

Objects in Motion (When Unbalanced)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/9157693) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/9157693>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Voltron: Legendary Defender
Relationship:	Keith/Lance (Voltron)
Characters:	Lance (Voltron) , Keith (Voltron) , Shiro (Voltron) , Hunk (Voltron) , Allura (Voltron) , Coran (Voltron) , Pidge (Voltron)
Additional Tags:	Fluff , Humor , Lance (Voltron) is a Mess , Keith (Voltron) is Bad at Feelings , Pidge is So Done With Both of Them , Slow Burn , Until Pidge Puts a Match To It
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Adjust Orbit and Velocity
Collections:	Klance , whatisthis , The Klance Fanfic Survey Fics , klanceforthelongrun , Cleo's Ultimate Guide to Fanfiction , For all your Klance needs , International Fanworks Day 2022 - Classic Fic Recs , multi chapter klance fics , Best Of Klance , No Good Very Bad Day Soft Comfort Klance , MUCH GAYNESS
Stats:	Published: 2017-01-02 Completed: 2017-01-19 Words: 37,634 Chapters: 6/6

Objects in Motion (When Unbalanced)

by [Mytay](#)

Summary

Lance and Keith are constantly being mistaken for a couple. Lance is highly offended. Keith is quietly outraged.

Pidge decides if she can't have peace, then she can write an epic scientific dissertation on the romantic failings of two exceptionally dense paladins.

Initial Observations

Chapter Summary

Lance and Keith are going to start a war one day. Pidge is not okay with this. Science will save the day!

Chapter Notes

I watched the show once, opened a document, and immediately started writing this. I have no idea what the exact outcome will be ... But there will be fluff and angst and space boys being silly about their feelings — of all that, I am sure.

Disclaimer: None of this mine, I am merely borrowing them to play a little and then putting them back, unharmed! ... Well, mostly unharmed.

Edit Jan. 29, 2017: A wonderful, wonderful person [created art for this fic](#)! Check out the photoset for some awesomeness! :D

Also, the sweetest person ever, **Illusion**, is [working on art for this fic too](#) and I am so damn happy and excited!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Planet: Mir

Date: 203 Days of Voltron

“We ask that your mated pair bless us in these proceedings!”

And there it was — a pointed look towards Lance *and* Keith.

Pidge sighed heavily to herself. *Not again*, she thought, bracing her hands on the dinner table. Shiro was next to her, frowning, and then his frown was clearing into a smoother, more peaceful expression — he knew *exactly* what was about to happen.

The explosions were imminent unless somebody reacted, *fast*.

Pidge saw that Allura knew it, too. She gave a panicked look towards the “mated pair” before assuming a more regal, lady-like pose. Less than a moment later, Hunk’s eyes widened hugely, and he had a hand hovering over Lance, waiting.

Coran was happily guzzling down his bright blue wine as if a metaphorical flaming meteor *wasn't* hurtling towards them at light-speed. Pidge envied him.

It started with Lance. “I’m sorry, *what?*”

Keith leaned forward, one hand clenching a knife tightly, *way* too tightly. Pidge readied herself to jump in front of a flying projectile, thereby saving a life from a far too hot-headed Red Paladin.

The Emperor Fr’ellin, a tall being with four arms (actually, maybe Pidge would sit this out — he could probably catch any knife thrown his way) and an incredibly long mane of crimson hair, answered with a boisterous laugh. “I do apologize, I know not what you would call yourself and the Red Paladin. Perhaps ‘bonded’?”

Coran snorted into his cup, spraying wine everywhere (including on Keith, who looked burning mad enough to instantly evaporate any liquid in a five metre radius).

Immediately, Shiro was speaking with authority over whatever Lance or Keith were sputtering/growling. “Our two knights are what we would call *comrades*. They are friends and Paladins, but have no other relationship beyond those roles.”

“Yes,” Allura added calmly. “There are no bonded or mated pairs amongst the knights, it would be considered a distraction, at best, to have such relations between —”

“Ah, I understand, and I am sorry for the presumption. I hope this isn’t some grave offence —”

Lance’s mutterings reached Pidge. “*Freaking highest offence, you couldn’t have said anything more —*”

“Not at all, Imperator, it is of no consequence!” Allura gave a bright, winning smile, though her eyes shone with the promise of *pain* when she glanced over at Lance.

The Blue Paladin shut his mouth, crossed his arms, and sunk low in his seat.

“Princess, then perhaps you and the leader of your Paladins would consider performing the blessing! I insist, as you are honoured guests!”

The blessing involved lighting a huge statue of a Mir deity on fire, and the chanting of a few words while holding hands. It looked really neat — after Shiro and Allura finished the chant, the statue burned with a bright pink fire that Pidge was itching to analyze. Perhaps the accelerant used, or the material that the statue was carved from; it smelled a bit fruity ... But never mind that, Lance and Keith should be her focus right now.

Pidge was supremely grateful to Shiro and Allura and their diplomatic ways. Hunk was patting Lance on the back, comforting while also mocking him mercilessly, no doubt, if Lance’s cutting glare was anything to go by. Pidge looked towards Keith, trying to catch his eye and see how he was doing; Coran seemed to take it upon himself to distract the other boy with some grandiose tale in which he used his utensils as story-telling aids. He succeeded in bringing Keith out of his sulk — mostly because the Red Paladin had to make sure that Coran didn’t upend the table with his enthusiasm, as the Altean simulated some kind of massive explosion using the punch bowl and several cups.

This was the *third* time Keith and Lance had been assumed to be a couple. Pidge was now, officially, no longer surprised.

But the *first* time had been pretty shocking.

Planet: Celthrius

Date: 119 Days of Voltron

Morning Meeting Between Celthrian Governing Senate and Team Voltron

“We would consider forming an alliance, but first we have a few concerns to address ...”

Pidge had practically fallen asleep as Allura and Lady Hycinthia discussed treaties and policies. None of it interested Pidge, except for one brief discussion about biological warfare; it ended quickly with a “No, let’s not,” even as Pidge tried to uncover what sort of chemical and biological technologies they had—for purely scientific reasons. She was shut down rather efficiently, though the head of the science division did praise her “inquisitive mind.” She felt weirdly homesick at that — so many adults back on Earth had dismissed her with almost that exact phrase.

Whatever, I could hack your systems if I wanted to, Pidge had thought, keeping herself from dozing off by contemplating a new decryption virus she had been working on.

Then came the moment that ended negotiations rather ... abruptly.

“Well, perhaps our last concern, a quibble, really, is that a few of our generals question the youth of your Paladins.” Lady Hycinthia was the Celthrians' eldest warrior, and she spoke with a cool command without being condescending. “Our society does not deem anyone under the age of majority — 30 rotations — eligible for combat training. And we certainly do not allow family or significant others to fight in the same units.”

Pidge straightened in her seat, waking up as she processed this strange statement. Family? Well, maybe they were a family of sorts, but none of them looked like they were related, genetically speaking. She glanced at each member of her team, and they all had the same puzzled expression. Except Keith. He just looked indifferent, blinking slowly — he might even be asleep with his eyes open (that had happened once, creeping everyone out; Hunk still occasionally snapped his fingers in front of Keith’s face whenever the Red Paladin was motionless for too long).

“I’m afraid I am at a loss here. None of our Paladins are related in terms of familial ties, but they are very close. Voltron demands that they be so.” Allura tilted her head, her lips pursed.

“We are no strangers to soldiers becoming closer than blood, Princess,” one of the generals said, twisting her exceedingly long fingers in Lance’s direction ... and then Keith’s. “But having two soldiers who are also lovers? We have found that to be complicated and dangerous.”

Pidge’s jaw dropped.

Keith almost fell out of his chair.

Lance? Lance exploded.

“You mean me and mullet-brain?!” He took in a deep breath as the general nodded — now she was the one looking confused.

“Naturally, you are clearly —”

Lance didn’t let her finish as he stood up, horrified and letting everyone know it. “THAT IS THE MOST INSANE — I WOULD RATHER EAT A LIVE DOG —”

Turned out dogs were sacred on Celthrius — and Lance’s specific word choice was considered not only blasphemous, but also extremely disgusting. Their loudmouth Blue Paladin was nearly skewered by several soldiers; Hunk tackled two of them while Pidge quickly used her bayard to subdue three others. Shiro overturned the table, grabbed Keith and Allura, and ducked behind said table. More soldiers poured into the room, likely hearing the skirmish and rushing in with their weapons drawn.

Lady Hycinthia cleared up the confusion very quickly with a decisive tossing of a stun grenade. While everyone was temporarily dizzy and on the floor, she gave a rousing lecture

both to her people and Lance about the power of words, and when context and consideration had to be applied.

After that bit of diplomatic blundering on Lance's part, he stayed away from any and all first contact situations for two months.

“It's not like we're Shiro and Allura — like, I get *that*. There's all these *looks*, and *tension*, and, like, endless *mutual respect*. They're *princess* and *knight in shining robotic armour*. It's so *obvious* with *them*. So why, why, *why* does this keep happening with me and *Keith*?!”

Pidge breathed out her exasperation, even as her lips twitched upwards at Lance's typical melodramatic whining. It was both funny and painful — Matt would totally find Lance hilarious, and Pidge hated that he wasn't here, that she couldn't connect her blood family to her newfound family. She took in a deep breath, pushing the hurt down as she did too many times a day.

They were back on the Castle, pulling away from Mir with yet another planet committed to opposing the Galra Empire. They had more supplies, and more ships added to the patrols — patrols that Shiro had designed with the express purpose of protecting currently unconquered systems. They would also hopefully act as an early warning if, and *when*, the Galra entered those sections of space.

However, with their success came Lance, unable to celebrate because he simply could not let go of this latest *aliens-think-Red-and-Blue-Paladins-are-totally-married* incident.

As much as she cared about Lance, considered him a brother even, Pidge wanted *quiet*. She wanted to be able to modify programs without Lance bugging her at least once a day to hack into Keith's room comm and blare Coran's favourite Altean operas at all hours. She was thinking of telling him to go for a quick fly around in the Blue Lion, one of the best ways to calm him down ...

But then again, maybe it was time to try and solve this particular Lance Induced Headache once and for all.

She turned to face Lance directly, holding back yet another smile as he attempted to spin one of her new Rover shells on his finger like a basketball. He actually managed to get it going before he noticed her unimpressed look; he set the metal ball down gently and then folded his hands behind his head, whistling innocently. One of her hands was idly inputting several coded commands into what could end up being a robotic mechanic, but she could do that in her sleep, let alone while listening to Lance rave about Keith. For the *hundred-and-fifty-third time*.

“Right, let’s analyze the situation, shall we?” Pidge swivelled a little on her stool, levelling Lance with a stare that actually froze him in place. *Good*, she thought with satisfaction. *Enough is enough*.

“As of four or so months ago, you and Keith were actually getting along — what happened?”

Lance stared.

Pidge waited patiently.

Lance fidgeted.

Pidge stopped coding, crossed her arms, and continued to wait.

Lance and Keith had been a subject of her scrutiny for a while — there wasn’t much in the way of entertainment on the ship, and Pidge could only create and maintain so many robots — and she had been drawing her own conclusions.

She even had a series of disjointed notes, gathered under the tentative title, *Observances On the Obtuse and Analysis on the Depths of their Density*. The first few points were as follows:

1) For all that Lance and Keith were constantly bickering, they frequently either stood next to each other or orbited around one another.

2) *Neither of them had ever crossed the line into physical brawls, though admittedly, some of their training exercises came close.*

Side-note the first: Lance and Keith trained together a lot. Often enough to have their own synchronized moves that worked fantastically in battle.

3) *They had been getting along better until precisely 85 days into their Voltron adventures, when suddenly, Keith became even more withdrawn than usual.*

Side-note the second: Even though they were back to butting heads near constantly, their ability to work together seamlessly in battle was not affected — and they even managed civil banter during those times.

There was more, but for now she mulled over those first three points specifically, as Lance finally seemed to come back online, making loud noises and throwing up his hands.

“I don’t know what’s going on! I don’t know what happened! We were buddies, I thought, we were *good*, and he was less of a jackass, and then ... One day he just went back to treating me like a piece of gum stuck on his badass biker boots, and at first I thought it was just, you know, a *mood*, but then he wouldn’t *stop*. So. There.”

“Did you *ask* him if anything was wrong?” Pidge already knew the answer to this question, but a scientist should never *assume* anything — hard data was the only kind of good data, after all.

“What do you take me for, Pidge?” Lance actually clutched at his shirt, just over his heart. “I am not *talking* to Keith about why *he’s* being a jerk. *Because* he’s being a *jerk*! *Who* wants to talk to a *jerk*? ”

“Lance,” Pidge said tolerantly, “I get that you’re really just a ball of sensitivity wrapped up in a thin layer of boastful, blatantly flirtatious, smarmy —”

“Okay, stop *any time* now —”

“— not-really-bad-boy, but Keith doesn’t know you like Hunk and I do. He doesn’t know that you’re mostly all-talk, except when, you know, it’s serious. And it *might be serious*.” Pidge emphasized these last few words, leaning forward to jab a pointed finger into Lance’s chest.

Lance rubbed at the sore spot, blinking as he contemplated her words. His eyes widened when they finally registered, and there was a slight edge of guilt there. “Do you think ... there’s, like, something wrong?”

Pidge didn’t think so — nothing *too* bad, at least — so she shrugged. “Maybe? Keith is only really close to Shiro, and I don’t think he talks to him all that often about personal stuff. He seems to sort of ...internalize things.” It was a problem, one that Keith had been getting better at before his sudden shift back into sullen teen stereotype.

As Lance went silent, Pidge turned to her programming, catching an error that might have resulted in her new Rover Mechanic possibly attempting a hostile takeover of certain algorithms, particularly those related to food production. Hunk would never forgive her if she didn’t fix that right now; she might not forgive herself either — Hunk’s experimentation with those production units had resulted in some very savoury goop the last few weeks.

“Pidge? Do you think that, maybe ...” Lance trailed off, his eyes glazing over, before he seemed to snap back to reality, waving off whatever he’d been about to say. “You know what? Never mind, this is dumb. Keith is dumb. All of this is *dumb*, and I refuse to let it get to me.”

Pidge let her head drop back, and she stared up at the ceiling, imploring any deity that might exist to help Lance *get his own head out of his butt, since I am failing*.

“Right. Good talk,” Pidge said, reaching in her tool unit for a small cauterizing tool and then slamming the drawer shut with a little more force than was necessary.

“Yeah, thanks for the help!” Lance stood up, ruffling her hair and giving her a wide grin. Pidge felt herself soften, just a tad — a point zero three five of a smidge — and smiled back at him.

Her good will towards the Blue Paladin lasted all of a week — when a rescue mission turned diplomatic opportunity blew up in all their faces, thanks to a Red and Blue Paladin scuffle that nearly caused a planetary *civil war*.

Pidge was *done*.

She was now moving from observing to *experimenting* until a solution was found because, clearly, these two *dolts* could not be trusted to sort out their own damn problems. They were family, after all, and Pidge wouldn't feel right if she didn't do what she observed most good families do — *meddle*.

Chapter End Notes

Well, having accidentally deleted my previous endnote, I will simply say, hello Voltron fandom! I love this space family a whole lot, with Lance and Pidge being especially dear to me.

I hope y'all have fun with this — I would love to chat with any and all of you. Feel free to correct me on anything I get wrong, or just flail about space boys. If you're shy, you can send me a message on [my tumblr](#).

The Hypothesis

Chapter Summary

Pidge gets Shiro to answer some awkward questions. Allura knows all. And there's an entire planet of voyeuristic aliens who think Lance and Keith are the cutest.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Shiro, do you have a minute?”

Shiro smiled at her, wiping the sweat from his brow as he exited the training room. “Sure thing, Pidge. What do you need?”

“To talk to you about ... It’s something I’m studying, and I need to understand the parameters I’m working with.” Pidge was still toying with the idea of telling Shiro *everything*.

On the one hand, he was their leader, and she respected him. He kept her secret without asking for anything in return, and he loved her family almost as much as she did. He would undoubtedly have great advice.

On the other hand, he would probably also try to interfere more directly, and Pidge wasn’t entirely sure that was the right course of action. Shiro was a great leader, but he sometimes had trouble letting his young team handle stuff on their own, especially when he felt like he could step in and fix it himself. (Pidge was choosing to ignore the irony of that statement as it applied to herself — Lance and Keith clearly were not even *trying* to figure their own crap out.)

“I’m writing a little ... paper on human behaviour as it contrasts with the species we’ve encountered so far.” She smiled innocently. “I can kinda only work with the team, since that’s all we’ve got to represent humanity, but I was hoping to get your input. I think you might have the most unbiased opinions.”

Shiro listened to her with interest. “Okay. What kind of things do you need to know?” He signalled towards the kitchens, and Pidge fell into step alongside him.

“Well, here’s the hypothetical situation — there’s an alien species that communicates using only body language and facial expressions. Who would be able to communicate most efficiently?”

What Pidge was looking for here was Shiro’s analysis on how Lance and Keith expressed themselves when they weren’t using *words*. People could say anything, after all, but involuntary reactions (facial ticks, unconscious gestures and movements) — that was where honesty lived. Most species on Earth relied on these kinds of cues to communicate effectively, and humans were no different.

“Lance,” Shiro answered instantly.

Pidge blinked. That was *not* what she was expecting. “Why?”

“Because Lance is the most straightforward of all of us, and the easiest to read,” Shiro explained, entering the kitchen. Pidge took a seat at the table nearest the food dispenser. “He rarely lies, but even when he does, it’s not ... deliberate? And it’s so easy to see through that he might as well not even be trying.”

A few weeks ago, Lance had crashed the small hover ship that dropped him off at the Blue Lion — the explosion had brought them all running. As soon as they saw him tumbling out of the tunnel, coughing and limping a little, he’d given them his biggest, most *not-guilty* smile and said, “*It wasn’t as if I was trying to see how fast it would go and then, uh, lost control, but if I was, could you really say that it wasn’t worth it? I think I broke the sound barrier three times over!*”

Ah, Lance. She conceded the point.

“Hunk would over-exaggerate too much. He’s not quite as comfortable in his own skin as Lance is. You would likely act in a more reserved way and then devote yourself to imitating the other person’s mannerisms in order to communicate — and you would probably succeed.” Shiro tossed a fond smile over his shoulder as he pushed buttons on the food dispenser. “Keith? Keith would be as easy to read as Lance, but for an entirely different reason.”

“Yeah?” Pidge asked, taking notes on her pocket computer. “Why is that? I still have trouble figuring him out sometimes.”

“Keith throws up walls like no tomorrow — constantly crossing his arms, turning his head away, keeping himself as disconnected from the situation as possible ... It’s obvious that he doesn’t like to reach out to others, to make that connection. But when he’s angry, it’s plain to see, and I’m not just talking about his blow-outs.”

“But he can have fun without making a big deal about it,” Pidge offered, thinking back to the food fight that cemented them as a team.

Shiro grinned. “He laughs more now than ever. And usually he’s not self-conscious about it. Like with the Orange Thing last month.”

Pidge snorted with laughter.

About a month ago, Hunk’s rewiring of the food production system ended up leading to a weird malfunction on the training deck wherein Lance was somehow stuck to the floor by a bright orange goop, and the robotic gladiators kept spraying him with it whenever he tried to escape.

Keith had laughed himself to tears before getting help. He was still cracking up as Hunk and Coran rushed to fix it, and as Pidge and Shiro worked on battling the gladiators back so they didn’t accidentally drown Lance in that orange goop (which was, sticky property aside, *really tasty*).

“Though lately ... Something’s up with him. He won’t tell me what it is. But he says it’s not going to affect the team ...” Shiro trailed off pensively.

Pidge let him have his time while she organized her notes — a lot of Shiro’s points coincided with hers, but he had given her a new perspective on some others. She had everybody’s body language categorized according to their moods and certain situations that called for deception, charm, or bluntness, but there was something she was missing ...

“How would we each react if there was attraction involved, of either the romantic or sexual kind?” Shiro fumbled the plate he was holding, juggling it three times before saving it from crashing to the floor. “I’ll understand if there is overlap there,” she said, speaking over Shiro’s uncharacteristic clumsiness.

He put the plate down and stared at her, blinking owlshly. “Pidge. I ... I know I’m not your brother or your dad” — Pidge flinched because *where was he going with this all of a sudden?* — “but if you have questions about that ... kind of stuff, you don’t need to use ... There isn’t any need to try and disguise it with ...”

“Shiro. I’m a scientist. I know all about sex,” Pidge said without hesitation. Then she gave him a bright smile. “In the academic sense.”

Shiro visibly relaxed — though not completely. He returned to serving food, the back of his neck red. “Right. Uh. So. What, exactly, are you asking?”

“Lance is really flirtatious, he's kinda overt when he’s into someone —”

“I wouldn’t consider it *that* obvious,” Shiro interrupted. He put a plate of orange goop in front of Pidge.

Pidge cocked her head, her fingers poised over her virtual keyboard. “What do you mean?”

Shiro sat down across from her, a spoon in his orange meal. He nodded towards her computer. “Lance has been hitting on people he’s attracted to, but I don’t think we’ve actually seen him really ... *interested* in anyone?” Shiro sounded uncomfortable, and Pidge appreciated him putting forth the effort despite that.

And he had made a very *fascinating* point.

“Hunk doesn’t seem to put a lot of stock in physical appearances all that much — it seems like he would respond to someone who has similar interests or beliefs, and then try to befriend them first, flirting later maybe,” Shiro said, taking in one spoonful, chewing thoughtfully and then continuing once he swallowed. “Keith ... Keith is complicated. I don’t know that he’s ever been interested in anyone, in any capacity. At least, not for while I’ve known him. I have no idea what that would look like.”

“Given his reticence to open up about, well, *anything*, I can extrapolate from his behaviour in other scenarios,” Pidge said, taping her chin with her spoon ... which was full of orange goop. She swiped at it and licked it off her thumb, delighting in the wonderful taste — like a curry chicken, but a touch sweeter? She really needed to find a way to thank Hunk for this.

Shiro shook his head at her, chuckling. “And you, Pidge? You, uh, you have any idea about ... You know what? I’m going to quit this conversation now, you have no reason to —”

“I’m still not ...” Pidge ate a few bites of the delicious orange goop and tried to find her words. “I haven’t really been able to think about it. I mean, school and my extracurriculars took up so much time, and what little I had, I spent with ... dad and Matt and my mom. And now, you guys. I just ... You guys are my priority, you and saving my family. Outside of that, I haven’t cared enough to try and figure that part of me out.”

Shiro nodded, his smile small and sad. “I get you, Pidge. If that ever changes, you can come to me. I mean, I’m not so great at this, as you’ve seen ... But I will absolutely try.”

Pidge ducked her head, nodding, trying to keep the worst of the fear and hurt for Matt and her dad at bay. *No, not now.*

“Matt was worse than you, don’t worry,” Pidge said, her voice only slightly shaking. “He couldn’t even say the word *sex* around me. I think he was convinced that I was just skipping those chapters in my biology textbooks.” Pidge rolled her eyes as Shiro burst out laughing.

“Yeah, that sounds like him. He once hit on a girl by making some kind of reference to Newton’s law of physics.”

“No, he didn’t!” Pidge slammed her hand on the table while the other reached up to her mouth. “Tell me he didn’t say —”

“Hey, I can really put your inertia in motion,” Shiro quoted in a terrible imitation of her brother, but Pidge found it hilarious anyway. “In Matt’s defense, he was coming off a robot-induced concussion, and the paramedic was pretty cute. You Holts and your fancy machines...”

Pidge spent her lunch with Shiro, sharing increasingly ridiculous stories about her brother. By the time she had finished eating, Pidge was eager to start on her outline for the experiment, but first, she needed to ...

Pay attention to where she was walking, apparently. She hit the floor butt-first, wincing and staring up at what, or rather who, had taken her down.

“Sorry, Pidge,” Keith said, extending a hand to help her up.

“Nah, it was my fault.” She stood and massaged her head a bit. “You’ve been spending way too much time on the training deck, Keith. It was like walking into a wall.”

Keith rubbed at the back of his neck sheepishly. “There isn’t a lot to do when we’re not on missions. It’s ... fun.”

“Yeah? You and Lance might have that in common,” Pidge suggested, watching his face to see if he unintentionally revealed anything. “Is it ... better to face a real opponent?”

Surprisingly, Keith didn't close off; he sort of rolled his eyes, but aside from that, the smile didn't disappear. "When he's not sucking at it, yeah, I guess. He's not as challenging as the gladiators, but the gladiators don't piss me off. It's good practice for when I face Galra."

"Because Lance pisses you off?" Pidge was itching to write some of this down.

"Yeah." Keith sighed long-sufferingly. "I get that he's your friend —"

"Lance is one of my best friends," Pidge corrected him gently. "But even I know he can be ... tiring. But I figured by now he's your friend too, right?"

The smile shrunk, and Keith nodded while not quite making eye contact with her. "Yeah. I mean, when we're not ... I have his back when we're on mission, and he has mine. That's all we really need."

Pidge didn't try to correct him this time (Allura had said more than once that Voltron's Paladins were meant to be *close*), she just nodded and gestured over her shoulder. "Shiro's in the kitchen serving up some of the orange goop."

"Yes," Keith said with a sudden enthusiasm. "I was really needing some food. See ya later, Pidge."

He walked off with his usual determined stride. Pidge watched him go for a moment and then immediately broke out her computer. As she typed in her new reflections, she started picturing the framework of her plan.

The times that Lance and Keith had been mistaken for a couple involved alien races who had three things in common:

1) They were usually mammalian (and thus far, humanoid).

2) They had very tradition-heavy cultures that treasured familial and romantic bonds — there was great respect given to those relationships, sometimes beyond reason.

3) They had an openness to them — more to the point, their societies seemed to value forthrightness, and there was little to no obfuscation when discussing certain topics.

On considering this last point, Pidge had to forcibly swallow down giggles as she recalled with perfect clarity what had happened the *second* time Lance and Keith had been labelled a couple.

Planet: Deltris

Date: 169 Days of Voltron

Evening Gathering of Deltris Elders Followed by Voltron Parade

“We are greatly humbled by your offerings,” Allura was saying to the Grand Moon Elder, otherwise known as Melquisor. “These supplies will greatly aid us. And I cannot express my gratitude for your housing of the refugees ...”

“My dear Princess,” Grand Moon Melquisor said, his eyes a bright green that seemed to glow. “We do not understand any other way. Those who-have must help those who-have-not. Now, let us bring you to the city centre and introduce you to our people!”

Pidge was captivated by the streaks of blue that adorned his skin; they were naturally occurring, the Deltris had told her. The streaks served no purpose now, but their ancient primate ancestors would disguise themselves from predators in their native habitat — the blue forests that covered almost every surface of this planet.

Pidge was jealous. For no scientific reason. They just looked really, really cool.

The other elders fell in line as the Grand Moon led them down to a large vehicle heavily adorned with vines and ribbons — the head of a welcoming parade, as Pidge understood it. Each Elder, titled after the twelve moons of Deltris (the Grand Moon being the largest in their sky), took a turn shaking hands with each member of Team Voltron.

“We are so very grateful for your warnings!” Ryon Meksa said (Ryon was the fifth largest moon, Pidge remembered). “The Galra threat was passed to us only in stories from distant travellers, but we assumed that they would never venture so far.”

“Their goal is to conquer all of known space,” Pidge said solemnly. “We’re just happy you believe us — not everyone does.”

“That is unfortunate,” Meksa said, her eyes flashing with concern. “You have all worked so very hard. We hope you can at least enjoy your last few days with us.”

The parade was ridiculously fun (and wondrous, floating them past many marvels of Deltris architecture — Pidge had taken hundreds of pictures).

The best part came at the end, when thousands of Deltris people gathered about the massive beacon at the centre of their city, a beacon that they had arranged to shine all five colours of Voltron. There was an astoundingly huge orchestra that played the most epic music Pidge had ever heard in her life.

At this point, Lance and Keith started having some kind of whispered disagreement that turned into a more vocal argument — that was cut off by the out-of-nowhere laughter and pointing of not only the Elders and Moon Guards who surrounded them, but also large swaths of the crowds, both those who were nearby, and those who could only see them on the projected screens.

Keith grabbed Lance’s arm, preventing Lance from making a no doubt incredibly rude gesture, but also getting his attention. “Quit it, jerk, people are staring!”

Allura was very much not impressed, but Coran was quite suddenly bent over double, cracking up.

“What? What is happening?” Lance was immediately on guard — though that didn’t stop him from winking at the audience of females nearest him, and even blowing a kiss. Some of them actually swooned, but many more were fervently pointing at him and Keith.

“Nothing, young Paladin,” said the Elder (Talth Brier, Talth being the seventh largest moon — Pidge was damn proud of her memory) who had been speaking to Coran. “I was only telling Coran that you and your partner are such a fascinating pair to observe. Please, continue with your pre-mating flirtations!”

Silence from all of Team Voltron. Except Coran. He was practically wheezing in his mirth.

Meksa clapped her hands. “Oh please do! Such an act of love would be an ideal way to end the evening! Let us prepare an appropriate bedding scene, and —”

Keith was so red at this point that Pidge was concerned he might literally explode. Lance was no better; his mouth was hanging open and his eyes were huge in his face.

“Oh, Ryon Meksa!” Allura squeaked out, not quite able to maintain her poise. “We, we Alteans and, ah, these Earthlings, do not consider such acts for, ah, public consumption? But, of course, if your traditions demand —”

“Uh, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, ALLURA?!” Lance screeched.

“I only meant that if others of Deltris wished to, ah, do so, it would not offend us!” Allura finished, putting a hand on Lance’s shoulder, her fingers tightening noticeably.

“Oh, I see!” Grand Moon Melquisor laughed loudly, and then he pressed the comm to speak to the gathered multitude. “I’m afraid the Earthlings are one of those reserved races, but let us show our support for their mated Paladins nonetheless — for love in battle is sure to conquer any enemy!”

There were some good-natured sounds of disappointment that turned quickly to whistling and cheering as Lance and Keith were featured on every screen Pidge could see.

Allura seemed to have exhausted her diplomatic skills in explaining that none of them practised exhibitionist sexual habits, and so further clarification, denying that Lance and Keith were romantically involved, seemed to be beyond her.

Pidge and Hunk were now laughing themselves silly, joining Coran in his fits, so they were of no help. Shiro was trying to redirect attention away from Lance and Keith while darting concerned looks their way.

The Red and Blue Paladins made sure to keep at least two metres between themselves at all times for the last couple of days they were on Deltris.

Pidge was pretty sure it didn't matter — as they had been packing up to leave, she had seen several merchant stalls selling detailed holos of Lance and Keith, the two paladins standing side by side and whispering into each other's ears.

“Princess Allura?” Pidge approached her with a smile, the one she used to get the latest in robotic engineering designs off of her dad when she was eight. “I would like to make a request.”

“Oh Pidge, there's no need to be so formal!” Allura smiled at her through the projected hologram of the galaxy. “I was just planning our next few diplomatic stops.”

“Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to ask you about.” Pidge called up a list on her computer, showing it to Allura. “Would it be too much trouble for our next few visits to be with aliens who fit these criteria?”

The princess cocked her head as she read the list, giving Pidge a quizzical look. “Not really? There are so many we must see — I can shuffle a few around that ... May I ask why?”

“Well, it’s sort of part of an experiment of mine?” Pidge scratched at the back of her head. Somehow, keeping this from Allura was a little awkward. The princess would be a good ally, but Pidge didn’t feel comfortable sharing until she had more data. More *evidence*.

“Pidge, what kind of experiment?” Allura handed back the computer and tilted her head in the other direction. (Pidge had been pondering about Altean body language in recent weeks, and one of her theories had to do with those head tilts — she knew they meant different things depending on the direction, she just hadn’t figured *what*.)

“Nothing that would interfere with our missions, I promise!” Well, no more than Lance and Keith’s issues did on a regular basis. “Honestly, I’ll just be observing and collecting data.” *For now ...*

Allura gave her an evaluating stare. “All right. I trust you. But, might I ask one thing of you?”

“Certainly!” Pidge agreed easily.

“Share your results with me once you’re done?” Allura said, a slow, knowing grin appearing on her face.

Pidge froze. And then relaxed. She knew her own face was probably giving it away, so she just grinned back. “Absolutely, princess.”

As she walked away from the main control room, she opened up her computer and typed in the key point of her research.

She had posited the question: *Why are Keith and Lance consistently called out for being a couple?*

Now her hypothesis, the basis of her experiment was formed: *Because I think these two dunderheads are actually in love with each other.*

Chapter End Notes

Well, now that the groundwork is laid, we get to some epic Pidge meddling and oblivious Lance and Keith! Yay!

I really want this to be done before season two, but I'm starting to get more ideas for torturing — I mean, helping, *helping* Lance and Keith ... Right. *coughs*

Basically, this may turn out longer than planned? If anyone strongly objects, please let me know :)

Comments are great writing fuel, so please be free with your critiques, questions, or just general ranting about Voltron — it's all wonderful to me. But regardless of whether you comment or not, thank you for reading! And thanks so much for all your kudos and bookmarks and the like! :D

Experiment the First — No Interference

Chapter Summary

Pidge stands by and watches Lance and Keith write the greatest space love story ever told without realizing that they are the main pairing in it. Yet another alien race is into it, and Pidge learns she's not the only member of Team Voltron who knows about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Planet: Jeeroon

Date: 218 Days of Voltron

First Contact with Jeeroon Ambassador

“Pidge, put the fuzzy green thing down, please.” Hunk looked pained as he spoke, his eyes fixed on the dog-like animal in Pidge’s arms.

It had bounded up to her as she had been scanning the nearby flora, nuzzling her ankles, making low-pitched humming noises, and occasionally scrabbling at her legs with its disproportionately huge paws.

Pidge may or may not be smitten.

“I’m gonna need you to give me a compelling argument as to why, Hunk.” She grinned when the creature gave a few quick barks in Hunk’s direction, sounding like it agreed with her.

The Yellow Paladin flinched. “Okay. Don’t freak out, but there’s a *massive* fuzzy green thing behind you, and it looks *really* unhappy.”

Pidge froze and then turned very, very slowly. *Oh*. Hunk was not kidding. A few metres away, partially hidden by the trees, was a massive fuzzy green thing; it was easily three metres tall and had a very large mouth, full of very sharp teeth.

Pidge put Fuzzy Green Junior on the ground gently. After Mama Fuzzy Green received her pup with much licking and humming, she gave Pidge a narrowed-eyed stare and then retreated back into the jungle.

“Holy crap,” Hunk breathed out. “Geez, Pidge. It’s been ten minutes since landing, could we *not* kick this visit off with a mauling?”

“It was nice and soft and a *puppy*,” Pidge countered, pouting a little. Having a pet on the Castle would have been *nice*. Rovers were fun to build and reliable friends in battle, but they weren’t exactly meant for cuddles.

“Yeah, I feel you, but we’re already dealing with the latest ‘let’s hope these aliens aren’t a *Galra* trap or *vicious predators with a taste for rare meats* or *into weird sex stuff*.’ ”

“What weird sex stuff?” Pidge asked, laughing. “Those other two, I remember, that last one, not so much.”

“I’m thinking of Lance and Keith being asked to perform the horizontal foxtrot with like, fifty billion people watching.” Hunk’s tone of voice was amused, but he still looked tense.

Pidge put a hand on his arm. “Hunk, Allura has thoroughly vetted our next few diplomatic stops. Giant green things aside, I think we’re safe from two of the three things you’re worried about.” She guided him back towards where the rest of their group was sitting on various huge and cushy-looking plants.

Hunk held her back. “Hold on. Uh, I need to ask you about something.”

“Is it the personal cloaking device thing again? Hunk, I swear I’m working on it —”

“Nah, it’s not that — though *yes, awesome, can’t wait* — it has to do with Lance.” He looked over to their team.

Shiro was standing guard while Lance and Coran chatted, both sitting on dark blue plants with thick leaves that actually resembled cushions. Keith was pacing around restlessly, bayard in hand. Allura was watching over everyone while occasionally darting looks towards the path where the Jeeroonians were supposedly going to meet them. No one was looking at Pidge and Hunk.

“What about Lance?” Pidge asked, feeling worry creep up on her.

“Nothing serious!” Hunk immediately waved off her concerns. “At least, I don’t think it’s super serious? Just that he’s been ... training a lot more lately, and he’s been really weird about talking to me about it, which is so not like him.” He flicked a hand towards the Blue Paladin, who was currently ... teaching Coran the Vulcan salute. “He’s open to us about feeling homesick, he’s been talking to me in Spanish because he’s afraid to lose it” — Pidge hadn’t known that, but it did explain why Lance had started to throw in a few Spanish words here and there the last few weeks — “and I know he’s been ranting to both you and me about Keith —”

“This all sounds like normal Lance behaviour,” Pidge said. “Except for not talking about the training ...” Here she trailed off, glancing over at Lance to see him clapping in approval as Coran made the *Live Long and Prosper* sign with both hands. “Hunk. Have you noticed how much Lance and Keith have been training together?”

“Uh, *yeah*. It’s been like, *months*. I don’t get how they can be all *buddy-buddy* in there and in battle, but then *verbally eviscerate* each other the rest of time.”

“So ...” Pidge was considering if she should recruit Hunk as a fellow observer, without necessarily telling him everything (Hunk wouldn’t feel comfortable keeping this from Lance, which Pidge could respect, but also, she really needed Lance kept in the dark because he would probably explode again and send Keith further into his shell than ever).

Essentially, today's experiment was one of non-interference. A control, so to speak, wherein all Pidge did was watch and take notes on what made the Jeeroonians believe Lance and Keith to be in a relationship (and Pidge had every confidence that this would *definitely* happen).

Pidge decided it would be beneficial to have an extra pair of eyes on this situation, especially eyes that belonged to the person who knew Lance best. "I have a theory about ..."

At this point, the Jeeroonians appeared along with path, emerging from the jungle in the space of a blink. Hunk jumped at Pidge's side, and Pidge flinched a little too, but she relaxed when she saw that their clothes were absolutely *brilliant* camouflage. The patterns and colours mimicked the bark and leaves of the surrounding foliage perfectly, shifting naturally with their movements; Pidge now wanted to spend most of her time here studying those fabrics to figure out *how*.

"Princess Allura of Altea, Coran of Altea, Paladins of Voltron," said Ambassador Garath, a tall being with a slender build, pale green skin and dark brown eyes. His hair was in a long, dark blue braid that trailed down his back, and when he reached their group, the braid fell over his shoulder as he bowed incredibly low.

"Your visit is timely. We discovered the Galra threat ourselves, less than twenty solar cycles ago." The Ambassador stepped back and his people — a group of guards, it seemed — came forward, extending robes to Team Voltron.

Yes, coolest gift ever! Pidge immediately donned one, marvelling at the way the colours altered smoothly as she flapped it against her body. "This is incredible! How do you make these?"

"We harvest the fur of several beasts that camouflage themselves in these jungles — it's a rather symbiotic relationship as their fur typically gets overly long and cumbersome in their later years," Ambassador Garath explained as he turned to lead them out. "Whatever other questions you have must wait until we reach the First Marshall's Palace. We chose this landing zone because it is the most discreet, but even so, we must be swift."

"You suspect the Galra may know, then?" Allura said, as they marched through the jungle.

“Not necessarily, but we would rather cement our alliance quickly in order to come up with a defensive strategy — the Galra have conquered two of our distant farming colonies. The invaders were not full offensive forces, rather well-armed scouts from what little intel we’ve received. We are concerned that they will be on our doorstep in far too short a time.”

Allura and Shiro shared a look, and soon everyone was exchanging glances, varying between worried, angry, and outright panicked. Jeeroon was a little closer to Galra-conquered space than other planets they had visited in recent months, but it was still a ways off. If the Galra scouting missions were nearby, then the conquering forces were likely to follow soon after.

That meant that their current overall mission, to gather as many planets as they could into an allied fighting force, had a much shorter timeframe than they initially thought. Not good. Maybe Hunk had been right to be paranoid.

Pidge clenched her fists at her sides — rescuing her family might not happen until all-out war broke out.

“But hey, it’s not all doom and gloom — look, puppy!” Lance called from the rear, and Pidge turned to see Lance clutching a familiar green fur covered creature.

“Lance, *no! Put it down!*” Hunk yelled, a hand reaching for his bayard.

Pidge already had her bayard in hand, and just as she raised it, Mama Green Fuzzy Thing emerged from the trees, eerily quiet despite her size — Pidge hadn’t heard even a hint of her.

Lance froze.

Several of the Jeeroonian Guard came up, weapons drawn, as the Ambassador called out to them, “Mewehs do not attack unless they are provoked! If you return the pup to its mother, no harm shall come to you!”

The Blue Paladin nodded shakily, easing the puppy to the ground so slowly it took almost a full minute for its paws to hit the dirt. In that time, the adult Meweh watched with eyes narrowed once more ... and quite abruptly, it was humming in a low rumble — a clear threat.

Pidge shifted her stance, wondering what had set it off ... And she saw Keith, who had somehow managed to stealthily make his way to just behind Lance, his own bayard drawn, a hand stretched out towards the collar of Lance's armour.

"Keith!" Shiro hissed, his eyes fixed on the giant creature. "*You need to back down.*"

Keith scowled and stopped moving, but he didn't back away from Lance. When Lance let go of the puppy, it took its precious time scurrying around his legs, yipping for more attention, whining with a high-pitched little hum when it didn't get the love it wanted.

"Okay, kiddo, fun time over, back to mommy. *Please, please go back to your mother, I don't want to be eaten today. Or any day, really, so please, spare me.*"

The puppy head-butted Lance's ankles a couple more times before giving one last little disappointed humming note and stumbling back to its mother.

As soon as the pup was a couple of metres away from Lance, Keith moved quickly, grabbing Lance by the back of his armour and yanking him behind the Red Paladin. Lance went with a few half-voiced protests, flailing his arms. "*Dude, wha — seriously, Keith, you know I can — really, you're such a —*"

The Meweh gave a loud snort, making everyone jump, and then disappeared into the jungle, the pup scurrying along behind her. There was a long moment of silence, and then Hunk's loud sigh of relief.

"Wow. Wow. I am not a fan of jungles. Let's not do this again, okay? Pidge, Lance, no puppies for you."

Lance shoved at Keith's shoulder and said, "Okay, listen *paladín cabezón*, I have said this to you *a million times*, you gotta stop with the automatic shielding manoeuvres! This is just like that time —"

"It was *malfunctioning*, it would have *gutted* —"

"Oh yeah? Well, how about with the —"

"No, no way I am letting you lecture me about that, when you were practically *unconscious* —"

"Paladins!" Allura barked out.

Lance and Keith turned as one to face her, both of them obviously still annoyed, but also respectful of her authority.

"If you would restrain yourselves until we are safely indoors, *thank you*."

Pidge had been ducking behind some of the guards, jotting notes down on her computer at lightning speed — *finishing each other's sentences, able to anticipate arguments, shared experiences and reference points*, and the big one, *Keith instinctively shields Lance to latter's irritation — meaning happening often?*

Shiro nudged her a little as they turned to walk. "Eyes up, Pidge."

She put away the computer, smiling at him. "Sorry, science was happening."

Pidge got a chuckle in response, and a quick ruffling of her hair.

Once they were behind the shields that led to the First Marshall's Palace, Pidge was surprised to see a *huge* assembly of important looking people. There were a variety of uniforms and armours, medals pinned to almost every breastplate, scientists and medical professionals, along with a few more civilian-types who were probably members of the Marshall's Congress.

"Well, I see you mean to waste no time," Allura said in a breathless voice.

Coran, Allura, and Ambassador Garath snapped to business, organizing each group according to their speciality and specific concerns. Meetings were held with each section of Jeeroon's military forces, panels of experts, elected officials, and then there was one massive conference involving everyone, broadcasted to the planet's other Congress Houses around the world.

It was systematic, went off astoundingly smoothly, and Pidge was completely shocked at how terrifyingly efficient the Jeeroonians were. In fact, things were going so well, Pidge was starting to get worried. The likelihood of this many people agreeing with minimal conflict ... Her mind was whirring, trying to calculate odds.

Keith was in the same boat as her, it seemed, and they gravitated towards one another as strategy, emergency planning, and back up plans culminated in inspirational speeches and bolstering of morale.

"There's a bomb somewhere, right?" Keith whispered to her.

"Or maybe someone's about to release a canister of poisonous gas?" Pidge suggested, her hand gripping her bayard — she had grabbed it about five hours into this now eighteen-hour session, and hadn't been able to bring herself to sheathe it.

"A saboteur, some wacko with a grudge, an anarchist ..." Keith rattled off, his eyes bouncing around the room, person to person, as if he could root out this hypothetical attacker on sight.

"You guys need to chill out," Lance said from right behind them.

Pidge gasped and then covered her mouth, waving at a few Jeeroonians who turned to give them looks. Keith didn't jump, but he did swivel around to glare at Lance.

“They’ve already had Galra mess with them, it stands to reason —”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Lance said, biting into a purple fruit that vaguely resembled a pear. With yellow dots. Pidge had no idea where he’d found it. “But things are going well for once. It seems like a waste to freak out about stuff that hasn’t happened. Wait for it, *then freak out*. In the meantime ...”

Lance stuck the fruit in Keith’s face. Keith glared some more. Lance waved it around, grinning.

Keith huffed. Lance tapped him on the nose with the juicy innards of said fruit.

Keith swore at him (quietly), while wiping his nose. A second later, he took a small bite of the fruit in Lance’s hand.

And then Keith whipped around as if nothing had happened.

Pidge was staring.

Is *this* what every other alien race they encountered was seeing? *No wonder* every one of them thought these two were dating, involved, married, *whatever*. Pidge was ashamed of herself for being so oblivious.

She readied her computer, jotting down yet more notes as the day wore on. And on. *And on*.

When all the serious business was concluded and everyone relaxed, (albeit marginally, since the day's wartime discussions weighed heavily on all of them), they were escorted to a banquet that doubled as a celebration of their new alliance. The First Marshall apologized for not allowing them to stay for a longer party, lest the Galra arrive unexpectedly, putting Voltron at risk — but apparently some kind of festivity was a must after such a successful (read: stressful) day.

Pidge was struggling to stay awake, and she wasn't the only one. They had been laying out battle plans and supply runs and spy missions and anything and everything else for *twenty-six hours straight*. The Jeeroonians were still going strong, but Team Voltron was about to drop.

While Allura was looking a little rough around the edges, she did her best to bolster them, sneaking them a few caffeinated (maybe? Close enough, Pidge didn't care to analyze the properties right now) drinks. The last person she reached was Shiro, and he leaned in to thank her, whispering in her ear. Pidge smiled a little at seeing their matching grins. Coran offered Pidge his cloak to act as a makeshift pillow, and then tucked her own cloak about her like a blanket. She was now nice and comfy at her table, but also far closer to sleep than she should be.

Food was served, and the Jeeroonians mingled with them, asking questions that ranged from the heavy topics of survival and military capability, to favourite colours and what sort of clothes they wore back on Earth. Pidge answered everything with a bright smile and no filter. She may have called Shiro her *space mentor on spacey war things*.

Good thing she was too tired to be embarrassed.

“I must ask, do you Earthlings have *kiyeneh*?”

The male Jeeroonian, one of the civilian governors who had asked the question of Lance, paused when the Blue Paladin gave him a confused look.

“Ah, allow me to explain — perhaps you Earthlings have a different term. The *kiyeneh* are a large part of our history. They were warriors who would test their mettle in the most dangerous of our jungles, with nothing material but each other to rely on. If they returned alive and relatively unharmed, then they were appointed by generals to fight in the most

difficult conflicts. There are many legendary *kiyeneh*, but none in recent history — we don't consider sending people unarmed and naked into a jungle to be all that civilized."

Lance's eyes brightened. "Dude, we had something kinda like that on Earth — the Spartan warriors did some crazy stuff, right from birth, to keep the whole population strong. It was ... a bit disturbing, and uh, really not cool in the sense that they were killing babies? But Spartans were some of the most impressive soldiers to ever soldier around."

Pidge smiled at this rather truncated and romanticized version of Ancient Greek history. She leaned back in her chair, watching Lance explain further, the governor listening closely.

"That is fascinating," the Jeeroonian governor said when the Blue Paladin stopped his ramble to breathe, interrupting Lance politely (Pidge was grateful — Lance had been launching into a summary of *300*, and she really didn't want aliens thinking anything about that was *real* Earth history). "However, *kiyeneh* were life long partners, fighting back-to-back to preserve each other and their nation's pride, lovers of the first order."

Pidge was now paying *very close attention* having heard the word *lovers*.

Keith was wandering over while the governor was explaining, holding a basket full of that purple and yellow fruit. The Red Paladin had been avoiding most of the attention, instead lingering near the buffet and then ducking into corners, eating on his own, and speaking only with certain Jeeroonians — a few generals and members of the engineering corps.

And now Keith was here, shoving the fruit at Lance, saying, "One of the generals passed this on to me to give to you. She said it was in honour of our jungle encounter or something."

The governor was now staring wonderingly at both Lance and Keith. Pidge had a distinct impression some more science was about to happen — she already had her computer in hand.

"Awesome, this stuff is *so good* ... Maybe we can grow it in Coran's garden?" Lance took the basket off of Keith, and, for once, there was no bickering, just an exchange of smiles ...

“Paladin Lance, I am honoured to meet the other half of your *kiyeneh*,” the governor said warmly. “Others have told me about you two — warrior pairings are so inspirational to my people. I confess, this was the reason why I wished to converse with you.”

Pidge watched as Lance took in the words, broke them down and absorbed them, and then started shaking his head frantically. “No, *no*, that is not —”

“What, what did you tell them?!” Keith demanded. “Lance isn’t my other half of *anything*.”

“*Exactly*, we’re knights, Paladins, proud owners of giant robot lions,” Lance babbled. “Why is it always — I swear, Keith, this is your fault somehow. *Madre*, what even *is this*?”

“*My fault*?!” Keith exclaimed, and Pidge was standing up now, getting between them.

“Okay, simmer down now, guys.”

Hunk appeared behind the governor, startling him. “Sorry, sir, but we gotta be heading back to our Castle.”

The governor bowed and thanked them before departing to join another chatting group. Pidge had the distinct impression that Keith and Lance were going to become the universe’s poster children for Epic Battle Romance. Even though they weren’t in a romantic relationship.

Which Pidge was going to remedy as soon as she could, since it had to be better than this constant *tension*, always on the verge of snapping, but never quite happening because they would fight, tease, and snipe, and then *retreat*.

It happened right then — Lance and Keith shot each other venomous glares *in perfect unison*, and then turned to walk separately back to the Castle. Shiro was giving the farewell speech on behalf of Team Voltron as Hunk and Pidge also started walking to the exit, escorted by a team of guards.

“So, earlier today — is it still today? I can’t even believe my feet are working right now — you were talking about Lance and Keith and training and stuff?” Hunk said, his voice soft and his words somewhat jumbled from tiredness. “I think I know what you were gonna say.”

“Yeah?” Pidge said, equally tired, too tired to even attempt to prevaricate. “Is your guess ‘Keith and Lance are head-over-heels but are too dumb to notice’?”

“Yeah,” Hunk sighed out. “I thought I was imagining it at first, y’know? But now, it’s just ... it’s obnoxious, is what it is.”

Pidge made agreeing noises, watching as Coran joined Lance, wrapping an arm around the Blue Paladin’s shoulder and telling him something that made Lance’s muscles loosen, a bit of laughter ringing out in the twilight hours of Jeeroon. Coran was really good at that, especially with Lance. They had similar senses of humour, and the same kind of openness about their feelings.

“I am going to fix this,” Pidge said with a yawn. “Like, there’s going to be some experimentation, and I may not get it right first try, but those two are going to be happy and together and no longer forces of chaos and destruction due to their belligerent romantic tension. I mean, look, *look* at that!”

Pidge was pointing at Keith, who was now lingering near the entrance to the Castle, waiting for Lance and Coran to enter ahead of him. There were Jeeroonians guards escorting them, lining the jungle path from Palace to Castle, and that wasn’t enough for the Red Paladin, no — Keith had to be there to ensure the safety of the *not-really-my-friend-because-that-would-mean-admitting-I-like-him* Blue Paladin.

Pidge was starting to rant in her own head. It was time to sleep.

“Gross,” Hunk said, his feet barely lifting off the ground, dragging every few steps. “Ugh, look at Keith’s face. It’s all blank and stuff, but he can’t keep his eyes off Lance right now. Clearly, he’s weakened by exhaustion. He wouldn’t normally be *that* obvious.”

Pidge appreciated that observation from Hunk. She would make note of it. After ten hours of sleep.

Once Lance and Coran were safely ensconced in the Castle, Keith turned his head to watch as Pidge and Hunk lumbered on up.

“Shiro and Allura are coming up behind us, with even more guards,” Hunk said, putting a hand on Keith’s shoulder. “C’mon, man.”

In that moment, Pidge woke up enough to see Keith dart a look back towards the path. She knew that Keith was the kind of worrier who kept it all bottled up and let it manifest like this — waiting up, staying behind, and pushing you out of the way of giant green jungle dogs. He did it for Lance now more than necessary, but he had done it for *all of them* at one point or another.

Pidge really loved her makeshift family. They were such wonderful disasters.

“I am not making sense to myself,” Pidge announced. “I have had less than five hours of sleep in a forty-eight hour period. That needs to stop.”

“Pidge, swear to me that it isn’t because of the mini-cloaking device, I really don’t want you ___”

“Shhh,” Pidge cut Hunk off, grabbing Keith’s arm. “Now is time for sleep. No guilt. No worrying. Just sweet, sweet unconsciousness.”

Keith let her lead him into the Castle, relaxing a smidge when he heard Shiro and Allura’s voices coming from further back.

Pidge gave Keith a hug before she spilt off from him to head towards her room. Keith stood still for a moment before patting her on the head and haltingly wrapping an arm around her

shoulders. Awkward but sweet. Hunk giggled and wrapped them both up in his arms, deliriously declaring *Voltron hug formation!*

Pidge was still grinning about it when she finally collapsed face first into her mattress.

Science was super important to her, but right now it was just a means to an end — the end being the happiness of her family. And, she thought sappily to herself (exhaustion, almost the same as being drunk), she really believed that Lance and Keith could make each other happy.

With the help of Pidge's supreme science skills.

She sighed and rolled over, cuddling her pillow and dreaming that it was green, fuzzy, and puppy-shaped.

Chapter End Notes

If you follow me on [tumblr](#), you may know that I wrote part of this chapter while listening to the *Yuri on Ice* opening theme. I couldn't tell you why it helped me out, but it did ;) [This is the specific version I listened to if y'all wanna check it out.](#) Even if you haven't watched *Yuri on Ice*, give it a listen — it's a fun, upbeat song :)

Comments, like awesome music, are very inspirational, so feel free to share your thoughts! And again, thank you so much for the kudos — also helpful in motivating me, and very nice to come home to after a rough work week. Hugs to all of you :D

Experiment the Second — Non-Avoidance Measures Applied

Chapter Summary

Keith is a stubborn, broody bag of emotions, and Pidge wants to help him, but he's making it so *difficult*. Also, more of Team Voltron joins in on the venture to make Red and Blue see sense.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Pidge and Hunk were sitting in the observing port of the training deck, both of them looking down at the Red and Blue Paladins. She had seen Lance heading towards the training area, closely followed by Keith, and she knew she had to see them in action. While on her stealthy journey to the observation port, she had messaged Hunk to meet her there.

She had expected Lance and Keith to be hissing insults and being unnecessarily brutal with each other in the arena, yet somehow still working as well together as they did in real battle.

What Pidge got instead were two highly competent individuals, calling out shots and moves, working together seamlessly with *no sniping whatsoever*. This did not match what Lance had told her about Keith's "jerk" behaviour *at all*.

Moreover, the Red and Blue Paladins had been running through a set of programs that had, apparently, been custom designed by them. Lance executed a fairly impressive leap over a ducking Keith, the two of them taking out three gladiators in one set of fluid movements.

"Keith must have added the bits of code that dictate no pauses between blows. As soon as one gladiator withdraws, another swoops in." Pidge showed Hunk the programming, though she had to poke at him several times to get him to look at the screen and not the raging battle going on below them. "I think Lance's touch was likely the instructions to randomize certain tactics, even if a particular attack has a lower success rate. It keeps the battles unpredictable — I remember Keith mentioning that there's rhythm to the fights, if you train often enough, but Lance introduced new variables ..."

“That is no joke,” Hunk said, his eyes skimming the code. “I mean, I’m not nearly as good as you at coding, and even I can see this is pretty rad.”

“The programing itself has a fantastic base structure — Keith and Lance input simple commands, the AI extrapolates. But I’m very impressed with the two of them all the same.”

Hunk and Pidge both resumed watching their friends destroy robots at a speed that nearly defied natural laws. Then Lance slipped up, crashing into Keith, taking both of them down, and several gladiators struck them at once. They received mild shocks that had them both wincing. A split second after the program ended, Keith whipped around while still laying on the floor, taking off his helmet to yell at Lance.

Pidge turned up the sound in the control booth so she and Hunk could hear. She felt a small guilty twinge at eavesdropping, but *anyone* could have walked in here to watch them — they hadn’t locked it down, or said that they were to be left alone, so it wasn’t an invasion of privacy *per se*, right?

When Hunk didn’t object, Pidge figured she was in the clear.

“I said to watch your footwork, Lance, damn it —”

“I slipped! It happens, dude, I’m not a graceful ballerina like you —”

Keith paused there, and Pidge could see, even from up above and at a distance, that he was holding back a smile. *“Clearly, you klutz. We’re running it again. From the beginning.”*

“Keeeth. Nooooo.” Lance threw off his helmet and flopped backwards, flailing his arms and legs a little. *“C’mon, let’s go to the pool. Swim a couple of laps or something.”*

“They go *swimming together*?” Hunk said incredulously.

Keith was turning away from Lance, shaking his head, his sweaty bangs falling across his eyes. *“Nah. If you’re too tired, we’ll just call it a day.”*

“Hey, we haven’t gone swimming in forever! Look, I said I was sorry for assuming your jackass behaviour was because you were a jackass as opposed to just acting like one —”

“Oh Lance.” Hunk sighed.

“— so please, please just let us get back to normal? Not normal before, when I hated you and your mullet. Normal after that, when we became buds. Sort of.”

Hunk and Pidge watched with baited breath as Keith didn't move — he spoke without turning around to face Lance.

“We’re Paladins, and we’re friends, Lance. It’s just ... weird. For me. Not just with you, but with everyone ... I haven’t done the friend thing for this long before.”

Lance’s facial expression was something else — there were too many emotions playing out at once for Pidge to interpret. After a brief moment, the Blue Paladin clapped Keith on the shoulder and said, *“Keith, man. I think it’s safe to say that Paladins of Voltron are pretty much friends for life ... uh, however long that life may be, which, y’know —”*

“Swimming sounds good,” Keith said suddenly, standing up and holding out a hand to pull Lance to his feet. *“But don’t think you’re getting away with just a two-lap warm-up. I’m thinking at least five.”*

“Can I just say that if we each had a stat sheet, your fun level would be a solid zero? Possibly a negative one.”

“And your annoyance level would be at least a sixteen, with a plus two bonus when irritating Red Paladins,” Keith shot back as they both started walking out.

“Wow, you’ve played RPGs. Online RPGs, I bet. No shock there, you just said you had no friends before —”

“Your charisma level would also suck —”

And then they were out of the room.

Pidge and Hunk were left staring, slack-jawed. Hunk snapped out of it first.

“Pidge. Pidge. Did you see that? *Did you see that crap?* This is like a rom com. A space rom com. We should be filming this, all of it, and editing it down to just under two hours and presenting it at screenings all across the universe. And aliens would be like, ‘So sweet, so cute, but really, the lack of realism, no one could be that dense’ and then we’d be like ‘surprise, mofos, this was actually a *documentary* and yes, *they are that dumb!*’ ”

“Lance is back to hanging out with Keith with no problems? How did we miss that?” Pidge was staring at her notes, tilting her head up at Hunk once she had reviewed a few recent points. “Also, Lance apologizing earlier, apparently ... Does it seem strange to you that he’s still in the dark about why Keith acted the way that he did?”

“Pidge, the fact that Lance apologized to Keith at all is kinda blowing my mind.” Hunk breathed out slowly. “But yeah, it’s weird. I’ve known Lance for a long time — he can hold a grudge forever, if he sets his mind to it.”

Pidge forgot about her notes for a moment, cocking her head in curiosity. “Hunk, when did you and Lance first become friends?”

“It’s a really short story. A few years before we both joined up in the Garrison, we were living in the same neighbourhood, but going to different schools. I met him when he walked up to me randomly and said, ‘I saw you hotwire that motorcycle, so amazing, can we be friends?’ I think we were nine or ten.”

“Why were you hotwiring a motorcycle at nine years old?” Pidge asked with a sly grin.

“It was my cousin’s, okay? He lost his keys, and he needed to get across town and — how could you even *think* that I would —” Hunk’s fake hurt had Pidge playfully slapping him on the arm. “Ow, okay! So yeah, best friends for life after that.”

Pidge’s brain set her back on track as she started thinking out loud. “Lance is pretty easy to get along with, isn’t he? Even fighting with him is easy, if that makes sense. He doesn’t hold anything back, he doesn’t make you have to dig for why he’s upset with you, and he’s willing to admit mistakes if you yell some good points at him ...”

“Yeah ...” Hunk waited patiently for Pidge to finish her thought.

“Lance *didn’t* get along easily with Keith. He called him his nemesis, his rival. He made it very clear that he hated him.” Pidge pushed her glasses up her nose, frowning at Hunk. “But Lance wouldn’t tell me why he and Keith stopped getting along a few months ago. Lance wouldn’t lie. Or he would, but it would be *obvious* ... So then the logical conclusion is that he *really* doesn’t know.”

Pidge hadn’t thought Lance would lie to her about not knowing why Keith had started openly disliking him again. That being said, a small part of her had been wondering if Lance was being deliberately dense — now she knew better. Lance actually enjoyed hanging out with Keith, which explained why he was so betrayed and angry when Keith suddenly turned on a dime.

Furthermore, despite being incredibly ticked off over Keith’s about-face, Lance was now happy to forgive and forget so they could hang out again. He was so dense it was actually hurting Pidge to watch, but he wasn’t doing it on purpose. He wasn’t in denial.

Which Pidge had already sort of known, but now she was certain of it. She made a note in her computer, and then bolded it and underlined it: **Confirmed Fact: Lance isn’t in denial — he is actually completely and utterly oblivious.**

“Keith, I don’t know about,” Pidge admitted. “What do you think is going on with him?”

Hunk considered this for a few minutes, and then took his turn processing his ideas out loud. “Keith suddenly withdraws from Lance, goes back to being all prickly-badass-porcupine around him, but he still trains with him, still kicks butt with him in battle, even while they are, like, constantly trying to murder each other with words ... Now they’re fine again, but he won’t let Lance much closer, and he won’t tell him what brought on the awkward ...”

Hunk and Pidge were stuck by the same epiphany simultaneously, their eyes widening, and Hunk actually lifting a hand to his mouth. Pidge knew Hunk had the same thought as her because Hunk was a like-minded genius, after all — and he looked as blown away as she did.

Pidge raised a hand in a *stop, hold up* gesture before Hunk could explode.

“Wait. It’s just a theory. We can’t prove it unless Keith says something, and we both know he absolutely won’t. What we need to do, right now, is talk to Allura.”

“Why Allura?” Hunk asked, lowering his hand.

“Because it’s time for my second experiment, and this time, I’m going to introduce a new variable ...”

Planet: Gyroq

Date: 229 Days of Voltron

Discussion of Bolstering Forces and Possible Alliance with Gyroq

“The people of Gyroq, also known as Gyrotians, are peaceful, but they are also very practical. They have some of the strongest defenses we’ve encountered, as well as a highly skilled military,” Allura briefed all of them before landing.

Shiro nodded, pointing at several projected images above Allura's head. "Their planetary shield is almost impenetrable except at a few access points, and even if you manage to get past those, there are thousands of sky-stations, populated by soldiers and robots, that also monitor everything that comes in and out. And that's not even getting into their ground forces."

"In other words, a full on assault by the Galra would be lengthy and costly," Coran said, stroking his moustache. "The quickest and most efficient way to invade Gyroq would be to sneak a small band of spies inside, and find a way to sabotage the shields as well as cripple the sky patrols. Then they could do their usual massacre-by-the-millions, destroy-all-hope thing."

Hunk winced. "Thanks for that description, Coran. So, do we know that the Galra have already managed to send someone in?"

"The Gyrotian High Conclave doesn't believe so. But they are a very pragmatic and ... plainspoken species. They tell us that they need our help to bolster their counter-espionage factions. We're here to recruit them as allies, if possible, but also to help regardless of whether or not they join our alliance."

"Guys, seriously, *we need a name*," Lance complained. "And not *Voltron Alliance*, because *way too obvious*."

"Well, you shot down *Rainbow Connection*," Hunk said, pouting. "Which works on several levels —"

"Dude, I love you, but *Kermit the Frog*?"

"I thought *The Merofiu! Bonnherd* would be appropriate, as it combines an ancient Altean mercenary band with the name of one of the oldest Paladin's of Voltron —" Coran started.

"You think we're like a mercenary band?" Shiro said, sounding pained.

“They were excellent mercenaries, quite dignified and high-minded! Helping the helpless, and all that, and there’s a story involving lost kittens —”

“No, *think about it*,” Hunk insisted. “Voltron is all different colours, no duh, but it’s also about hope, and bringing people together —”

“Man, *Rainbow Connection* works on maybe *two* levels. Hey, did you know Kermit the Frog’s name in Spanish *es la rana Rene*? Weird, right? I think the song was *El gran arcoíris*, or something like that ...” Lance made a hand gesture that meant nothing to Pidge, as he leaned back in his chair.

“*Arco Iris*?” Allura said, actually hitting the pronunciation almost exactly — *Ahr-Coh-Eee-Rees*. She even managed to slightly roll that first ‘r’. “What does that mean? It sounds serious.”

“It just means ‘rainbow’ — I always thought it sounded cooler in Spanish,” Lance said. The sad smile on his face was the one Pidge associated with Lance thinking fondly of home, of his family. Of Earth.

Pidge pushed down her own memories of watching Muppet movies with her brother, mocking the horrible quality, but loving the characters and music. They must have watched *Muppet Treasure Island* a million times ... Pidge shook her head, trying to physically force herself to focus on the present.

“The Arco Iris Alliance,” Allura said thoughtfully. “You know, it would be a good name to use in our transmissions to our fellow allies. If the Galra did happen to pick up any chatter related to it, they would not connect it to Voltron —”

Hunk pumped his fist. “*Yes! Rainbow connection lives!*”

Lance started laughing. “Is this our theme song now? *Some day we’ll find it, that rainbow connection* —”

“— *the lovers, the dreamers, and me!*” Hunk finished off, and he and Lance actually harmonized *wonderfully*.

Pidge may have mouthed the words along with them, but so did Shiro — they both grinned at each other. This was so *ridiculous*. She was witnessing two members of a robot fighting force, sitting at a wartime meeting discussing the potential incursion of the planet they were currently orbiting, and breaking out into a song sung by *a muppet frog*.

She decided to accept this reality as it was; if Pidge looked too closely, she may start to go into the sort of tailspin that would have her questioning every facet of her existence along with the foundations of space and time.

“This visit, like so many others, is mostly diplomatic, and so while we best always be alert, please do not let yourselves become overly paranoid. The Gyrotians are a lovely people, and the planet itself a technological marvel. Give yourself some leeway to learn and appreciate,” Allura concluded with a warm smile.

“Hear that, Keith?” Lance nudged the Red Paladin as he got up from his chair. “You need to take some time, smell the synthetic roses. Enjoy the sights.”

“I can try. Without your running commentary, I might even succeed.” Keith shoved Lance a little, and then kept walking, ignoring Lance’s laughing protests.

Allura gave Pidge a significant look. Pidge nodded. The princess had agreed to assist her today, but she had also made Pidge promise to keep things simple — and to ensure that Pidge and her two subjects were not so distracted as to put themselves at risk.

Pidge had agreed readily, and made sure Hunk was in on exactly what was going to happen.

Hunk had voiced several concerns, which Pidge had listened to; she then had simplified her plan even further. She didn’t want to embarrass Lance or Keith. But the experiment did need to happen if Pidge wanted to prove her hypothesis correct.

So Keith and Lance might just have to deal with having their feelings exposed a little bit. Prodded here and there. Really, it was for their own good in the end.

Planet: Gyroq

Date: 232 Days of Voltron

Second Meeting of Gyrotian Counter Espionage Faction and Team Voltron

It had taken almost three days, but it finally happened.

“It’s been fascinating to observe you Earthlings!” gushed Ter-Rinel, a behavioural analyst. She was charged with preserving the mental well-being of the new Gyroq spy teams. “Especially your commander, Shiro the Black Paladin? I didn’t know I could find another species attractive, but by sun’s light, he’s a *damn fine human*. Is he attractive according to Earth standards?”

“Perceptions of beauty vary country to country, and even person to person,” Pidge said, hiding a smile as Allura flinched at the topic. “I see him as family, so it’s difficult for me to view him in any other light, but I think most of Earth people’s would agree with you.”

They were all trying to relax after today’s visit at the new Gyroq Counter-Invasion Stealth Agency (“*The GCISA?* We’ve helped to create a *CIA* on another planet?” Lance had said, his eyes narrowing. “That’s both terrifying and awesome. But I’m kinda leaning towards the first one.”)

Ter-Rinel had been working closely with Coran, and it was she who had suggested they all (including other Gyrotians they had been liaising with) spend their afternoon respite at a local park. This natural space somehow managed to feel warm and secluded right in the depths of the capital city.

Shiro was currently alongside Coran, speaking with two members of the High Conclave. Lance was holding court with several different Gyrotian spy recruits, Allura sat next to Pidge, weaving crowns of flowers as Ter-Rinel gushed; Hunk was on Allura’s other side, passing her

more flowers. Keith was standing a little ways from everyone, arms crossed, sullen expression firmly in place. There hadn't been much for him to do this last day, but Allura didn't allow him to escape to the Castle, insisting all members of Voltron had to be present.

It was the simplest plan Pidge had, but it wouldn't give her the data she was looking for until a certain thing happened.

“Your Lance is quite the charmer as well,” Ter-Rinel said, winking at said Blue Paladin, who paused his conversation with the other Gyrotians to wink back, blowing a kiss. “If I were less professional and less respectful of other's claims, there would be such wooing — my mating gifts are the best out there.”

Pidge took her computer out — she hadn't missed that *respectful of other's claims* part. Which meant that it might *finally happen today*.

“Good thing you're so professional,” said Pidge, settling more comfortably on the purple grass with her computer in hand, laughing a little as Keith scowled. “Because Lance sure isn't. Don't tell him about the gifts. We sort of need him to stick with us and help save the universe.”

Lance gave Pidge a rude gesture without looking at her, and Pidge laughed harder. Lance was as committed as the rest of them, but Pidge loved that he was more relaxed about it — it helped her (and everyone else, she thought) feel a little less pressure, a little less like the world was caving in on them. He also didn't mind being mocked, and Pidge needed to leave her sarcastic barbs with someone who wouldn't take them to heart.

The Gyrotians found sarcasm to be quite funny, as they didn't usually practice it since they were far more *direct* with their insults.

When Allura had said that Gyrotians were straightforward, she had failed to elaborate on the exact nature of that — namely, that they had *no filter whatsoever*.

Pidge had been asked if her height was stunted no less than three times; Shiro had been hit on by *everyone*; Allura received several proposals (two for marriage, and four to become the

head of various agencies, including the newly founded GCISA), and a few people wanted to cut her hair for research purposes; Coran was constantly facing absurd questions about his mustache (Gyrotians did not grow facial hair — though they had a fair amount on their heads and legs); and Hunk was apparently a good candidate for fatherhood, and if not that, then becoming heir to some massive engineering company owned by one of the Gyrotian High Conclave members.

But Keith, poor Keith — the fact that he was so withdrawn was *nigh unheard of* on Gyroq, and so they were *constantly badgering him*, (a few medical professionals were certain he was *ill*, and thus were pestering him to give them DNA samples or ... other such things). Shiro got them to stop by very pointedly telling them that Earthlings considered prying into personal matters highly offensive.

The Gyrotians appreciated the information, and then were kind enough to leave Keith alone (though they were casting him looks now and again; the science divisions in particular looked like they wanted to *dissect him*.)

Lance was having the time of his life. He loved the Gyrotians, and they loved him back.

“Lance, please, you gotta finish telling me about this great Earth warrior!” said Fre-Lised. The young male was maybe just a few years older than them (he was sixteen, but a Gyrotian year was about four hundred days).

Lance gave Ter-Rinel one last smile before turning back to his previous conversation. “Well, Obi-Wan Kenobi was one of the greatest Jedi to ever —”

“Lance,” Pidge warned. “What did I say about telling Star Wars as fact?”

“Aw, but Pidge —”

“No, Fre, you’re asking the wrong questions!” Ter-Rinel cut in, clapping her hands. “While I’m sure Earth history is fascinating, I’m way more interested in you! Specifically, how did you and Keith become *lifemates*? Oooh, I really love lifemate stories! Tell me, did your eyes meet across a crowded room? Did you save each other’s lives and bond over battle?”

Pidge and Allura stared at each other, and then slowly turned to look at Keith. The Red Paladin didn't seem surprised — just tired. And resigned.

Lance hung his head, groaning. “Nooooo. Not *again*. Listen, Ter-Rinel, Keith and I? We're buddies, sometimes rivals, occasional play-enemies. But that's it.”

Ter-Rinel's orange eyes widened. “Seriously? I know that you Earthlings tell lies a lot, is this one of those times? Oh, yes, it is — you're testing my ability to suss out a lie! Oh, but this one is so obvious! Nice try, Lance!”

“Ah, no?” Lance said, and now he was sounding truly perplexed. “I mean, why would I lie about this? What made you think —”

“We must be heading back to the offices!” shouted Grel-Nolin, Allura's contact and one of the oldest members of the Conclave (also, the man who wanted to name Hunk the heir of his engineering conglomerate; Pidge was pretty sure Hunk had a contract sitting on his computer, waiting to be signed). “There is still much work to do!”

“Yes, this has been a lovely break,” Allura said, brushing a few stray petals off her lap, smiling at the group of Gyrotians who now bore flower crowns (Hunk had one too, as did Coran, and the flowers suited them both rather well, Pidge thought, a grin on her face). “But I'm eager to ensure you are all as prepared as possible.”

“Understandable and appreciated,” Ter-Rinel said, smiling. “Grel-Nolin had a few training exercises in mind for some of the new recruits ...”

“I think it would be a good idea for them to see a match between two Paladins, don't you?” Allura said, smiling sweetly.

Pidge deeply appreciated the princess in this moment. Keith had been marching towards the building, no doubt going to head up to the launch platform and the Castle — away from Lance, as he always did when these situations arose.

But this time ...

“Keith! Lance!” Allura called, a hint of sternness in her voice. “Please follow Grel-Nolin, a demonstration is in order for the latest batch of soldiers. They need to see what it is like to fight Galra.”

“But —” Keith started, then stopped, because Lance was standing up, stretching and saying, “Hey, no problem — me and Keith will give ’em a real show!”

Pidge walked along behind them silently, her eyes on the Red Paladin.

Keith was excellent at avoiding Lance once the false accusation of being together was made — he would disappear or disengage from the situation. But Pidge's uncomplicated experiment was based in wanting to see what would happen if he was forced to keep in contact with Lance after they were called a couple. Science-based match-making involved the collection of as much data as possible.

She hadn't expected a sparring match, but that was definitely one of the better options for forced interaction.

“This might be a bad idea,” Hunk said quietly as they approached the training fields. “I mean, Keith and Lance are back to getting along ... Maybe you should —”

“I know,” Pidge said. “But the way things are going, Keith is probably going to explode again at some point down the line ... Maybe at a point wherein lives hang in the balance ... And, Hunk? You know that they would be good together. Like, disgustingly good.”

Hunk exhaled loud and long. “Yeaaaaah. I know. I just worry about poking at Keith. He's ... tricky.”

Tricky was one word for it.

Pidge thought there was a better one, but a few hours later, she was too annoyed to think of another.

Keith and Lance had been called forward into the holographic interface the Gyrotians used for training — the holograms were solid composites, using a carbon-base that mimicked organic beings, but could be broken down and reformed *ad infinitum*. (Pidge had already asked for and been given a few samples and schematics — Gyrotians were so cool.)

When Keith and Lance were shown the input codes for training scenarios, they had asked Pidge for help — and unbeknownst to them, she had seen and memorized their mock battle codes back on the Castle, so she helped them translate that into the Gyrotian computer flawlessly.

But instead of robot gladiators, the Gyrotian holographic systems mimicked *actual Galra* in a large field of grass with a few trees. Lance and Keith apparently could not see beyond the end of the hologram, so they were cut off from the few hundred or so raw recruits, Conclave members, and the rest of Team Voltron, watching them. They seemed to relax once they couldn't see the crowd, launching into battle with no hesitation.

“Lance! To your left!”

“Right! Your right, Keith!”

They shouted instructions to each other, performing just as well, if not better, than they did on their own training deck — the soldiers were cheering them on, most of them sounding awestruck. Lance and Keith were a sight to behold, their instinctual movements making them not only fast, but also so sinuous they were constantly flowing from one attack to the next, with no breaks or hesitancy.

It made Pidge so *proud*. Shiro was practically beaming satisfaction right next to her, and Coran was yelling his approval so loudly he nearly drowned out the booming shouts of the soldiers.

By the time they wrapped up, Lance and Keith were sweating, though smiling hugely, accepting the praise that rained down on them from all sides.

But then Keith tried to escape *again*.

After Grel-Nolin asked his recruits to make observations on what had made Keith and Lance a successful team, one young soldier piped out, “Part of it has to be that they’re lifemates. I don’t think we’ll all have that advantage!”

“No, perhaps not,” Grel-Nolin agreed, not allowing Lance or Keith to get a word in. “But being lifemates is not what made them such impressive combatants — *constant training* is key. They know each other so well in battle that they move as two units who function as *one*. A facet of lifemates, to be sure, but you can certainly achieve that level of skill if you prepare *constantly*. The Galra, as you saw, are not an easily defeated foe.”

Keith was suddenly no longer at Lance’s side, but Pidge had seen him attempt to slink away, and she caught up to him in no time.

“Hang on, Keith, sorry — I know you want a shower, but I think Allura still needs you.” She tried to sound apologetic (and she was, to an extent), but she needed to keep Keith next to Lance.

He didn’t complain. He just went back to his spot, quiet and grouchy, of course. Lance flashed him a grin, a rather helpless *well, I guess this is our lot* sort of expression.

And Keith *turned away*.

Lance frowned a little, but shrugged it off.

Pidge took notes. And also frowned.

Lance and Keith answered more questions. Keith loosened up a tad as they went deep into strategy and exercise regimens. Then the question period ended, and all of Voltron's Paladins, plus a few others, were invited back to Grel-Nolin's home for dinner. Once again, Allura came to Pidge's aid, deliberately seating them so that Lance and Keith were right next to each other.

On Lance's other side was Fre-Lised, and his eagerness to hear anything and everything the Blue Paladin had to say. He was rather cute, Pidge supposed, with his light blue complexion, soft silvery hair pulled back in a high pony tail, his eyes a deep grey that tracked Lance's mouth.

Lance definitely noticed said cuteness. His smiles were widening into knowing grins, and he leaned in more and more as he spoke. Spots of purple were shimmering across Fre-Lised's cheekbones and down his neck. His seven-fingered hands were clutching his utensils tightly, his nervousness apparent in every gesture.

Keith had his head down, staring intently at his food.

Hunk rolled his eyes at Lance, and then looked at Pidge pointedly.

Keith was still avoiding Lance, even though they were pressed in close together. Well, it was worth taking in as data — Pidge jotted notes down just as Lance stood up to find a bathroom.

Fre-Lised took in a deep breath. "Uh, Keith? I'm sorry about ... Lance is being really nice to me, but I can see it's making you uncomfortable. I'm ... I can't help it, but I'm sorry?"

Keith looked up at him, confused. "Sorry about what?"

"About ... being really obvious over how much I like Lance. He's your lifemate, and I —"

“He’s *not*.” Keith slammed his hand down onto his armrest. A tense moment passed as he sucked in a deep breath, reestablishing his calm, but Fre-Lised flinched back regardless. “Lance isn’t *my anything*, so you’re welcome to him.”

Fre-Lised stared openly. “But you’re so compatible, you’re so ... How —”

“Because, I ... Because Lance isn’t —” Keith stumbled over his words. Hunk was staring, a hand reaching out to grab Pidge’s shoulder. She had her computer in her lap, forgotten, as Keith started to say what she and Hunk (and probably Allura) were thinking ...

“Guys, shove over, lemme back in this!” Lance slid into the table, his eyes trained on Fre-Lised. Keith snapped back into his seat, mouth clamping shut, and Pidge threw her hands up in air, holding in a scream, but only just.

Keith went right back to avoiding Lance. Even sitting right next to him. Even as Lance engaged him in conversation, drew him out of his broodiness. Fre-Lised seemed to sense the thing Keith was holding in, and he politely distanced himself from Lance, finishing his dinner quickly and giving Lance a quick handshake before departing. Keith’s issue was recognizable to *everyone ever, except Lance*, and Pidge was hitting new levels of done *every day*.

They arrived at the Castle of Lions after a delicious meal, ready for bed, though Pidge was wide awake enough to stay up all night, beating her head against a wall.

Instead of doing that, she approached Shiro before he could disappear into his own room and said, “You need to talk to Keith.”

“Why?” he asked, pulling pieces of his armour off as he pressed the button to open the door. “Is something wrong?”

“Yes,” Pidge said plainly. “Not horribly, terribly wrong ... but remember that thing Keith said wouldn’t affect the team? It’s affecting the team. Make him talk to you about it. Sooner rather than later.”

Shiro paused in the doorway, and then stepped in to toss his helmet, gloves and vambraces onto this bed. He walked right back out. “All right, but maybe you should come with. I have a feeling you know what’s going on, and if Keith is going to deny it to my face, I need you there.”

Pidge nodded, and she left her computer in her pocket. Right now, science was taking a backseat.

As frustrated as she had been with Keith, she had noted the way he stumbled over his words ... He sounded so frustrated. He had been looking so tired, so self-defeating. Not a single one of Pidge’s friends should be suffering like this, especially if the solution to their problem was something actually achievable.

“Keith?”

Keith was in the kitchen, serving himself up a plate of orange goop paired with a meatloaf-type thing Coran had made (which, when properly salted, was actually pretty good).

“Hungry?” Shiro asked, sitting himself down across from the Red Paladin. “We just had a five-course meal.”

Pidge hovered, not quite willing to insert herself into the conversation. Not unless Shiro directly requested it of her.

“I wasn’t hungry earlier. Now I am.” Keith sat down as well, and he began to eat methodically, a steady series of movements. He didn’t falter, even when Shiro sighed heavily and leaned in.

“Kid, I’m going to need you to talk to me, and you need to be honest — no more avoiding the issue, okay?”

Keith nodded, swallowing his fifth mouthful (why was Pidge keeping track? She was nervous, worried, her brain calculating things that had no relevance).

“Okay, a few months back you were messed up about something. It dragged on for a while. Lately you seem better. But every once in a while I see you crack a bit. And I’m not the only one that’s noticed.”

Keith shot a look in Pidge’s direction. She tried to offer up a supportive smile, but given his blank stare, she was fairly certain she’d failed.

“Nothing’s wrong that’ll —”

“You said that last time, but I’m not buying it anymore,” Shiro said. When he spoke again, his tone shifted, softening. “The way you’re acting, snapping unpredictably, withdrawing when whatever it is that’s bothering you acts up again — that can affect the team. Diplomacy is just as important as battle — strategy, tactics, moves and countermoves, and if something goes wrong? It can be just as disastrous. Keith. Talk to me.”

Silence. Keith kept eating, but he was barely chewing anymore. The quiet lingered on until Pidge couldn’t take it anymore.

“I know it has to do with Lance,” she blurted out. “Just talk to Shiro. To us. We can help, if you let us.”

The colour drained from Keith’s face. His eyes went wide, but he quickly closed them, facing away, his hands clutching the side of the table tightly.

“Keith ...” Pidge breathed out. “Is it really that bad?”

The boy made a soft, pained noise.

“*Yes.*” It took ages, but the word was such a relief to hear, even if Keith sounded like saying it *hurt*. “It is that bad. I’ve never dealt with anything like this, okay? And *there’s nowhere to go*. I can’t run from him, I can’t avoid him, we have to be here, together, and it freaking sucks. It’s just ... constant, all the time, wanting to hang around with him, hating that I can’t ...”

Shiro waited for Keith to stop and then said, slowly, “Keith, say it out loud. That’s a good way for us to start helping you.”

Keith sighed brokenly, his voice cracking all over the place as he finally, *finally*, confessed.

“I ... I think I like Lance. I think ... I think I *more-than-like* Lance.”

Pidge fist-pumped. “Yes, geez, *yes!* Why was that so hard to spit out?!”

“Because I *can’t*, Pidge. He’s ... He’s not for me,” Keith snapped. “He’d laugh, or worse, and I couldn’t handle it!”

“*That’s ridiculous,*” Pidge said, stepping towards him, sitting down next to Shiro. “Lance is *great*, you stubborn jerk. And he’s not cruel like that, how could you —”

Shiro sat in quiet surprise throughout this revelation, until he cut Pidge off, “Keith, where are you getting this? Lance is one of the nicest people I know, second only to Hunk. You can’t really think he would tease you for this? Especially considering that it’s more than likely he returns your feelings.”

Pidge whirled around to stare at Shiro. She had no idea their leader had picked up on that.

Keith scoffed. “Have you *seen him*? The way he flirts with anything half-attractive that moves? There’s no way. I’m not saying it’s a bad thing that he does it — Pidge, stand down — I’m just saying he’s never ... He would never see me that way. So. Yeah.”

He stumbled into another silence and Pidge rubbed at her face, tiredness creeping up on her that had nothing to do with her long day.

Shiro raised an eyebrow at Keith. “You know what? I think you’re giving up because you don’t want to take the risk. I think you tried to keep Lance at a distance when you figured out how you felt about him, and when that didn’t work, you decided to go back to being friends — and now you don’t want to lose him.”

Keith swallowed hard. He hadn’t touched his food at all in the last few minutes.

“Maybe,” was all he said.

Pidge could have cried she was so happy at finally getting one half of the Lance-and-Keith duo to finally *admit* that something was going on. And she could have cried from *frustration* because Keith was so, so thick.

“Keith, what if I told you I know for *a fact* that Lance feels the same way,” Pidge said in her best no-nonsense voice. “And that I can *prove it*.”

Keith opened his mouth, clearly ready to object, then he froze as Shiro grinned, nodding along with Pidge. “Yeah, Allura told me about that.”

“What? *What?* Allura *knows*?” Keith sounded miserable.

“And Hunk,” Pidge added. “All of us *know* that Lance is head-over-heels. He’s just ... like you. Not willing to take the chance.” *Doesn’t even know there is a chance to take, but one step at a time.*

“I ... *what?*” Keith was absolutely flabbergasted.

It was kind of awesome to see.

“Look, just you wait, okay? I’ve got this,” Pidge said, smiling supportively again, and this time it seemed to have some effect because Keith blinked at her, his face taking on a pink flush.

“I ... I don’t know ...”

“Do you trust me to have your back in battle?” Pidge asked seriously. “To save your life?”

“Yes,” he said without hesitation.

“Then, I think you can trust me with this. Look, we all figured it out, not just because of your behaviour, but because of Lance’s too,” Pidge said. “But I don’t want to go into details because it’s up to Lance to tell you about his side of things. But *it is* noticeable. Again, give me a chance, and I’ll show it to you. Or rather, Lance will.”

Shiro leaned back in his chair. “So far, Pidge had been doing a good job of observing without interfering too much. I think you can trust her to be discreet. The worst that happens is nothing, and you go on as you have been.”

Keith looked back and forth between the two of them, and suddenly he was sagging low in his chair, letting out a quiet, resigned breath. Then, in a surprisingly strong voice he said, “Okay.”

He sat up. He stuck his spoon in his food and looked at Pidge with a gleam in his eyes — that gleam he got right before he figured out just the right way to take down an enemy. When he launched into a fight that he knew he could win. When he walked into the training room with Lance and kicked off a dance that only he and Lance could perform together.

“Okay, Pidge. I know you’ve got my back.” He ate a few more bites of food before shoving his plate away. “What do I need to do?”

“Right now? Get some sleep. Go on as normal,” Pidge said, grinning up at Shiro. “Next time we touch down on a planet? That’s when you need to prepare yourself.”

Keith nodded. “Gotcha. So, uh, if Hunk knows ... And Allura ... Does that mean Coran knows too?”

Pidge shrugged. “I’m not sure, but we could ask him?”

“No thanks, I’m feeling embarrassed enough as it is,” Keith said, holding his hands up. “And ... I’m feeling ... better. A bit.”

“Good,” Shiro said. He stood up, rubbing at his neck. “So, if you don’t mind, I’m going to take Pidge’s advice and head to sleep. I suggest you both do the same.”

What Pidge really wanted to do was ask Keith questions, find out every little thing about how he fell-in-like with Lance, but she knew he deserved a break — he needed time to process what had just happened.

“No problem,” Pidge said, also standing up. “You good, Keith?”

“I don’t know,” he answered honestly. “But it’s not ... This is weird, right? This isn’t how ... regular liking someone, dating, whatever ... this isn’t how it normally goes?”

Pidge laughed. “We pilot robot lions that form a giant robot of mass destruction. Who cares about normal?”

Keith nodded, his smile small but real. “Fair point.”

Pidge clapped him on the shoulder as he walked alongside her. “You can forget about normal. Even people back on Earth don’t really fit into one category easily. Or even more than one. This is your normal, Keith. And we’re here to help you deal.”

“I see that now,” he said, splitting off from Pidge to head to his room. “And ... thank you. For whatever happens, but ... thank you, for this.”

He didn’t elaborate on what *this* was, but Pidge got the idea. Friends. Family. Sticking together. Having each other’s back in all things.

She practically skipped to her room. Once there, she wrote in her science journal as she lay in bed, unable to keep the smile from her face.

Keith has been developing feelings for Lance for months. Hunk and I realized it a few days ago, confirmed fact as of tonight.

Half of my hypothesis has been proven correct, and now I have Keith as a willing participant.

The next experiment should be the conclusive one — the last one. With Hunk, Shiro, Keith, Allura, and possibly Coran on my side, there’s no way it’ll fail.

Pidge fell asleep with her computer on her chest, and with the idea that maybe she would publish the results of this whole process as two different works — one as a dissertation, and the other as an epic space adventure romance.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was like pulling teeth. I would write, delete, re-write, delete ... I blame it half on writer’s block, and half on *Keith*. He was driving me crazy. I kept trying to engineer moments for him to finally ’fess up, but it just wouldn’t feel right, and so stubborn boy kept his mouth shut. Gah.

Please let me know if you catch any mistakes, I was too tired to proofread thoroughly.

I'm still not satisfied with this, and I'm sorry if it wasn't worth the wait, but hopefully the next one will be better! Thanks for your general awesomeness — I really wanna give you guys something you'll enjoy reading, so apologies if it takes a bit.

Experiment the Third — Direct Implementation of Romantic Tropes

Chapter Summary

Pidge and the rest of Team Voltron go all-out to finish this — the Red and Blue Paladins *will* be skipping off together into the sunset. Pidge cannot settle for anything less. Her science is the best science, and Lance and Keith will not mess up this experiment because then Pidge *will* be forced to step in to *bust their heads together*.

For science. And for the sake of their stupid happiness.

Chapter Notes

Fair warning — my inner fangirl may have been given too much power over this chapter. I am sorry, but also not because it was *way* too much fun.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Wow.” Hunk put down his soldering tool, turning to face Pidge full on. “*Wow*.”

“I know!” Pidge didn’t clap her hands together because that would be far too enthusiastic for this; childish excitement should be reserved for complex robotics and fantastic new holographic technologies.

“I can’t believe he just ... Okay, so we know for sure what’s up with Keith.” Hunk shoved his work on the jetpack aside and brought out his own computer, expanding the screen over the desk. “So, what do we do now? Lance isn’t repressing anything. He’s just really obtuse.”

“Yeah, but he won’t be for long,” Pidge sang out. She brought up what Allura had forwarded her that morning, sending it to Hunk’s screen where it lit up in huge, bright colours. The translation program worked its magic after a moment: *Celthrius Graciously Extends Welcome and Good Will to the Arco Iris Alliance — Please Join Us on This Date for Celebratory Festivities*.

“What ... Is this a party?”

“It’s even better!” Pidge paused for effect. “It’s a *ball!*”

“A ... run that by me again?”

“A ball, a grand evening of drink and dance!” Coran burst out, making Pidge and Hunk jump in their seats, an embarrassingly loud squeal escaping Hunk.

Pidge put a hand over her pounding heart. “Coran, you almost lost two Paladins just now!”

Coran ignored her and waltzed over — literally. “Allura and I will be offering dance classes to whoever wishes to join. I say ‘wishes’, but it is mandatory. After our last ... mishap with the Celthrians, we want to put our best foot forward, so to speak.”

Hunk stared. “This isn’t a real thing. We are not going to a *space ball.*”

“It’s being held on the planet surface, so no, you are not going to a space ball,” Coran said cheerfully. “Please report to the training deck at 08:00 tomorrow.”

Pidge groaned, and Hunk threw his hands in air. “Really? This is a thing we have to do?”

“Absolutely. Paladins are a diplomatic force, and diplomacy often requires dancing!” Coran twirled his moustache then, leaning in to whisper to them. “Allura informed me there was a conspiracy of sorts afoot, and that the end goal was to ensure the happiness of two particular paladins.”

Pidge and Hunk looked at each other and then back to Coran. “We’re trying,” Pidge said. “They’re being a little ... obstinate.”

Coran snorted. “A very polite word for those two. I confess, I don’t know Keith as well as I would like, but Lance and I have formed a close friendship. He is a sensitive boy, and he seeks out people to both offer comfort and receive it. He deserves joy in his life, especially considering how much he misses his home and family.”

Hunk’s smile was small and sad. “Yeah. We’re ... we’re all kinda working on that together.”

“It’s getting better,” Pidge said with determination. “You and Allura are helping us a lot, Coran. Thank you.”

“The princess and I know a little something about it, as you ... Well.” Coran cleared his throat. “I didn’t mean to get so serious — just know that in this mission, we are all your allies! Your support! We shall get those all-too-stubborn knights to see the light!” Coran grinned at them before he turned on his heel to leave, humming what had to be some Altean tune, his feet sliding smoothly to the beat.

“Oh man.” Hunk chuckled. “Keith and Lance are so in for it.”

Pidge finally gave in and clapped her hands. “You have no idea. We are breaking out every romantic cliché in the book, Hunk, and picking the most disgustingly fairy-tale like ones. We already have a *ball* to work with.”

Hunk brought up his computer screen again, fingers poised over the virtual keyboard. “Lay it out for me. I bet I have a few good ones for you — my dad and my sister, we watched every cheesy rom com known to man, going back over a hundred years ...”

“Good, because we might have to use *all of them* ...”

Date: 235 Days of Voltron

Dance Lesson, Training Deck

“I can sort of dance,” Lance offered, sounding less confident than usual. “I wasn’t the best at it in the family, but I know a couple of steps.”

“Really? That’s wonderful!” Allura had her hair pulled away in a ponytail, her pants loose and her shirt flowing. Her feet were bare; she looked like she was ready more for a cup of tea and a good book rather than an all-day dance training session.

Pidge really wanted that cup of tea herself. She had no sense of rhythm and no interest in acquiring one. She was dressed in baggy shorts and a tank top, not unlike Hunk and Shiro. Lance and Keith were both wearing sweatpants and T-shirts.

“Lance, would you like to demonstrate?” Allura gestured towards the empty spot next to her.

The Lance of several months ago would have jumped at the chance to pair up with Allura for a dance. But now, he just shook his head, smiling self-deprecatingly. “Ah, not really? Can you just teach us and we call it a day?”

Hunk raised a hand. “I second that emotion.”

“But if you feel like loving me, if you got the notion, I second that emotion!”

“What the —” Hunk jumped up as Smokey Robinson’s voice rang out over the speakers.

“Sorry! You all have such eclectic collections of music on your devices,” Coran said, holding up his own pocket computer. “I had the Castle download all the songs on your old Earth gadgets. Er, except yours, Pidge — couldn’t crack your firewall.”

“That’s right you couldn’t,” Pidge said with pride. She was *so relieved*. The phone that had made the journey with her from Earth had some pretty embarrassing music on it. Her love of 1980s power ballads and hair bands was not something she wanted to share with the universe at large.

Keith was looking distinctly pale as he rushed to say, “Could we not, uh, play mine? Also, sort of violating our privacy, Coran.”

“Yeah, seriously, not cool!” Hunk chimed in.

Lance shrugged. “I’m good.”

Shiro smiled. “If you can still respect me after listening to my collection of K-pop and seventies rock, I think we’ve bonded even further as a team.”

“The *point* of this,” Allura interrupted, “is to find music you’re comfortable with and teaching you some basic steps. Now, the Celthrians and Alteans have some similar popular dances. Relatively easy.”

"Let's start with an old Altean orchestral beat!" Coran pressed a button and something that sounded like a fusion between country and classical music started playing — maybe with an Irish sort of feel to it? Pidge was no musical connoisseur.

Allura lifted her hands to about waist height and started moving her feet in a quick-slow rhythm.

“That sort of looks like a cha-cha,” Shiro said. “Do you need a partner?”

Allura shook her head. “No, not really. Some dances can be done in pairs, of course, but I wanted to teach you the more basic ones first. This move is the foundation of many of those.”

Hunk was already imitating Allura and doing a fairly good job of it. Coran was executing what was probably the more complicated version of the dance, waltzing around the group with his eyes closed, humming along to the music.

“Hunk, that is perfect!” Allura clapped as Hunk became more confident in his steps under her praise. “Right, so if you wish to turn, you simply slide over like this” — she executed a move that reminded Pidge strongly of the *Macarena* — “and then resume your previous steps.”

Hunk executed the turn flawlessly while Pidge stumbled over her own feet. Shiro managed to follow along as well, though there was a slight hesitance in his motions that made his less smooth than Hunk’s.

Lance watched both Hunk and Allura carefully before making his own slower but mostly correct version of the dance. Keith was standing with his arms crossed, but he loosened his stance when Allura shot him a smile and encouraging nod. He made a few quick steps, nailing the moves though he faltered at the end.

“Excellent!” said Coran from behind them. “Now, let’s try it with some Earth music!”

Quite suddenly, drums and a smooth guitar were playing a quick, sharp rhythm, definitely Caribbean in flavour. Lance brightened, and his feet were moving as if of their own accord. A woman’s voice, deep and raspy, rolling her ‘r’s with emphasis, started singing in Spanish.

“Aw yeah!” Lance started imitating Allura’s steps, but then he seemed to switch over to what looked like salsa to Pidge.

“Lance! That’s lovely — teach me!” Allura stretched out her hands, and Lance took them, pulling her in with a spin. She laughed as he grinned — not his flirtatious, suave grin, but a playful, happy one.

“I’m really not that good,” Lance apologized, his smile never falling while his feet moved back and forth. “But my mom made sure I knew enough to not embarrass myself at weddings and quinceañeras.”

Allura watched Lance's feet and then started imitating him. As the song had an easy beat to follow, soon enough Allura and Lance were dancing up a storm while Pidge and Hunk cheered them on. Coran watched with a huge smile, his own feet matching their steps. Shiro was grinning ear-to-ear too, and Pidge leaned into him a little, sneaking a look up to see his eyes tracking Allura's moves a little too closely, perhaps.

"So, this is like the one thing I can do," Lance said, executing the same basic salsa steps, and then he actually blushed a little. "There's, uh, supposed to be a little more *hip* to it, but I'm not —"

"Lance, show me!" Allura was speeding up, forcing Lance to move even more quickly — and then he was laughing with her.

"Okay, fine, you asked, princess!" He pulled her in a little closer, and then he *really* started to salsa.

Pidge was quite impressed, but also a little uncomfortable because he moved his hips in ways she wasn't sure she should be watching. Allura flushed a bit too, but her eyes gleamed, and she met him move for move.

After the song ended, Pidge suddenly remembered Keith, and she whipped around to see the boy in question gaping at them, his cheeks a distinct dusty pink.

"You can absolutely dance!" Allura said, hugging Lance before pulling back, holding him at arm's length. "Now, maybe you and Hunk can help me whip these others into shape, hmm?"

Allura gave Pidge the subtlest of winks before spinning Lance around and shoving him in Keith's direction. "Right, you go with Keith! Pidge, you —"

"Hunk'll help me out," Pidge said immediately. "You and Shiro are a close match in height, so I think that's best."

Shiro gave Pidge a look — and Pidge gave him a sweet smile right back. *You're welcome*, she mouthed when Allura's back was turned. Shiro shook his head, though he did smile at Allura when she faced him. He offered her his hand with a slight bow.

"Coran, more music, please!" Allura called out.

Coran saluted. "Right away! Earth music is so vibrant!"

A pounding rhythm broke out, a woman half-singing, half-speaking in a loud, throaty voice.

Keith groaned. "Crap."

"Keith!" Lance seemed surprised and delighted. "This is ... What even *is* this?"

"It sounded cool! It's a good exercise song!" Keith defended himself. "I don't even know where I heard it, but I ... am not going to be embarrassed."

"Nah, it's badass!" Lance said. He was nodding along to the beat, his hips seemingly having their own ideas of what to do.

Keith's eyes were drawn downwards, but they snapped right back up. Hunk hid a laugh in his shoulder while Pidge nudged him to keep quiet. Keith needed their support. It was necessary to have the Red and Blue Paladins close to ease Lance along to his own realization, but Pidge knew that this was going to be rough for Keith, and so she smiled warmly at him when he glared at her.

"Not exactly conducive to the type of dance we're going for, but I like this one too!" Coran clicked a button once the song ended and swapped over to another from Lance's collection.

“Ah, Santana — classic!” Lance cast a look over at Hunk and Pidge. “*Dale*, Hunk, I know you’ve got it in you!”

“Uh, *perdón, amigo*, but my mom’s from *Peru*. Totally different flavour of music. My hips don’t have the same elasticity, thank you ever so much.”

“All right, team, let’s go! Coran, give Hunk and Pidge help, if needed.” Allura stepped in closer to Shiro and started executing the same steps as before — though Pidge noticed they had a slight bit more *hip* to them now.

Hunk stared at his and Pidge’s feet. “Okay, it won’t hurt if you step on me ’cause you’re tiny, but let’s not do that too much? So, when I step forward, you take it back ... Like that, cool.”

Pidge tried to pay more attention, she did, but she kept watching Lance and Keith out of the corner of her eye.

Lance had stuck out both his hands, making a grabbing motion. “All right, Red, let’s do this.”

Keith kept his mouth pressed into a line, robotically holding up his hands. Lance snatched them and kept a respectable distance between them.

“Right, I’ll let you lead, so you when you take a step ...”

Keith followed Lance’s instructions while keeping his eyes stuck to their feet. Pidge shifted her attention back to what she was doing — and she had actually been mimicking Hunk with a high degree of success until she realized it ... Then she stumbled.

“Pidge, you gotta relax. You got this,” Hunk said, grinning at her.

“I know, just my brain hasn’t gotten the memo yet.”

An hour of practicing went by quickly, set to the tunes of an eclectic collection of music, ranging across all genres and decades, with a few Altean classics thrown into the mix (including a club sounding beat that Coran and Allura sang all the words to as they rocked out), and ending on a slower rhythm from Altea that Allura used to start off the pair dancing lesson.

“Same steps, but your hands rest about here on your partner to start,” Allura explained, demonstrating on Shiro. One hand was at the base of his neck, the other rested on the middle of his back. It really was quite close to Earth’s dances. Pidge immediately turned to see Lance stepping into Keith’s personal space, sliding his hands around Keith’s back and nodding his head.

“Got it. Keith, buddy, get with the program,” Lance said, his face turning to watch Allura ... And missing the way Keith grit his teeth and closed his eyes for a split second before his face smoothed back into that casual indifference.

“This is the starting position, and then as you take steps, your hands will shift ...”

Allura went through a series of complicated motions, her hands ending up on Shiro’s arms, and then grasping Shiro’s hands in a tight grip, and then somehow back to the first pose. No one managed to get that right, even Hunk and Lance.

“Uh, Allura, if it’s cool with you, I think I’ll just stick to what my mom taught me.” Lance took Keith’s hands, moving one onto his shoulder, and the other he clasped tightly in his own, holding it up just below shoulder-level; he started moving, and Keith fell into step, not once looking at his feet, but also not quite meeting Lance’s eyes.

The song playing wasn’t anything Pidge recognized — it seemed like an Altean ballad, but upbeat and playful. Lance grinned widely as Keith followed him across the floor. Lance suddenly spun him out and then back in. On the return spin, Keith ended up pressed back-to-chest with Lance. The Blue Paladin was smiling so broadly his eyes were crinkling at the corners. Keith was staring at that grin, a smile playing about his own lips ... until he felt all the eyes on them.

Keith coughed loudly and stepped away.

Pidge could have died from the cliché nature of it all, except that she was furious. Allura couldn't have set this up better, and Keith was *ruining it*.

“Right, we'll learn a few more simple steps and then we'll take a break — I expect you all to be practicing as much as you can until the day of the ball!” Allura sounded cheerful, but her eyes were narrowing when they slid towards Keith and Lance.

Pidge could relate. She would lock them up in a broom closet if she didn't think that Keith would one hundred percent spend that time in pig-headed silence.

Good thing she had other romantic plays in the arsenal Hunk provided. She had joked about using all of them ... But she was beginning to think that might actually be necessary.

Planet: Celthrius

Date: 245 Days of Voltron

Half an Hour Before Welcoming Celebration

“Okay, that is fantastic, Pidge!” Hunk said enthusiastically.

“Thanks,” she said, smoothing out her green dress. She hadn't worn one in such a long time, and it was rather nice. She was also wearing spandex shorts underneath because she wanted to be able to run freely — just in case. “The fabric synthesizers on the Castle are what's fantastic, really. Allura helped me with the design.”

The dress was comfortable, a rich emerald green with darker embroidery in a vine pattern, and short sleeves that were shaped like leaves. It ended just below her knees, showing off her efficient brown combat boots. There may or may not be some small tools and devices inside of them. And, of course, she had her bayard resting in a holster on her hip.

Hunk was wearing an achkan in a creamy white with yellow stitching and darker yellow pants. It was fitted to him, and he was currently fussing with his sleeves nervously, his neatly combed hair gleaming in the lights as he turned his head this way and that, double-checking his outfit.

“You look awesome, Hunk,” Pidge said, smiling up at him.

“Yeah? I tried to describe it as best I could to the computer. It couldn’t synthesize silk, but it’s pretty close. I based it off the suit my dad used to wear to like, every family wedding back in India —”

“And it’s amazing.” Pidge grabbed his wrists and adjusted the cuffs for him. “Relax.”

“Yeah, I don’t know why I’m freaking out. We’ve already got these guys as part of our alliance, and it’s not like I’m the one that nearly blew it last time ...”

“Well, Lance might still screw it up for us,” Keith said as he walked into the room. “Did someone remind him that insulting dogs is strictly off-limits?”

“Dude ...” Hunk whistled. “Nice. Somehow I was expecting you to go all-black on this.”

Keith was wearing mostly black, but the simple button up shirt and black leather-like pants were offset by a rich red jacket with tails. His hair was long enough to pull back into ponytail, though locks of it didn’t quite have the length, so a few fell across his forehead and others framed his face. If Pidge were to attempt to sum it up, she would say he looked like a scoundrel prince.

“That’s what I wanted to do ...” Keith tugged on the bottom of his jacket; the front ended just above his waist, contrasting with the long tails in the back. “But Allura said this was better ...”

“Are you ready, *amigos*?” came Lance’s voice. “We’re heading out in five!”

Keith stiffened. Pidge took pity on him. “Yeah, Lance, you go on ahead!”

“Don’t be long, guys ... I’m ready to party, but, uh, I also don’t wanna go it alone in case these people hold grudges?”

Hunk laughed. “I’ll head in with you, buddy!” He winked at Pidge and gave Keith a comforting pat on the shoulder as he left.

Pidge was standing in front of a mirror, and she turned back to it, trying to clip back her own stubborn strands of hair. She watched Keith in the reflection as she stuck pins in to restrain the last few rebellious locks. It was a messy half-up, half-down style, and it was all she was willing to attempt. Keith was smoothing down his shirt. Pidge could see a slight shake to his hands that all but disappeared when she turned around — he disguised it by forming fists that rested at his sides.

“Keith, c’mon, I promise to keep this relatively painless. It’s meant to help, to give you the proof you need to ...” She waved a hand, implying any number of things — a confession, a kiss, a grand declaration, whatever.

“Sometimes I don’t even know how it happened,” Keith said softly. “He really got under my skin. Not at first, but when he made me his rival, it was ... Then working together and his constant smart-mouth and over-confident boasting and ...”

Pidge didn’t think Keith realized it, but his angry ranting was made less angry by the fact that the corners of his mouth kept twitching upwards.

“He’s just *always on*, he never holds back. Cracking jokes, talking about his favourite beach, his older brother’s ranch, his younger sister’s soccer scholarship, and teaching me how to dance rumba ... Pidge, he keeps talking like I’m going *home* with him, to meet his family and swim in the ocean.”

Keith had been speaking more since Pidge and Shiro got him to admit it his feelings for Lance, and she was seeing now that Keith was ... lonely. Maybe had been for long before they met him. She had never heard him speak about family, and Shiro had implied that he had none. Pidge had never heard him speak about friends, and the overheard conversation between him and Lance had told Pidge that the Red Paladin hadn't had any long-lasting ones until now.

These revelations hurt her heart; as much as she missed her mother, father, and brother, at least she had them, had the memories, and that feeling of being loved unconditionally.

“Keith, I am sure that Lance cares for you, and not just as friend, but even if I’m wrong — there’s a two point seven percent chance to allow room for error — then you need to know that he *does* care for you in that friend capacity at the very least. Just like I care, and Hunk, and Shiro is basically your brother. We’ve got you.”

Keith nodded once, then winced. “Okay. Can we, uh, not have another one of these *special* conversations in a while? It kind of makes me feel pathetic.”

Pidge grinned. “You sure? Hunk and I could arrange time for these weekly, and schedule some group hugs, maybe even a group sing-along, using all those great songs you —”

Keith snatched her waving hand, pulling her in under his arm in a light chokehold.

“Don’t you *dare* with a noogie, I just got my hair —”

Keith started walking, tugging her along. “Yeah, yeah, I’ll be careful. Just remember that I’m not all emo thoughts and tragic backstory, yeah?”

“I got it!” Pidge gasped, laughing and yanking at the arm around her neck. “Lemme go!”

As they made it out of the Castle, Keith helped Pidge check her hair, tucking a few wayward strands back, and straightening out her dress, which had been slightly rumpled. Pidge pointed

out that Keith could use a few pins in his own hair, and he had said, “Hey, if you can reach up here, you’re welcome to try.”

“You know that I could probably knock your legs out from under you and accomplish my goal that way.”

“Violence over science, Pidge?” Keith asked, sounding surprised, though his mouth formed a smirk.

“Sometimes it’s necessary,” she said solemnly, hand on her bayard.

Keith grinned, his own hand drifting to the bayard partially concealed by his long jacket (which Pidge realized, having been pressed in close against it, had a faint floral pattern to it, red-on-red). “I think you’d be fun to spar with — or against. We should do that one-on-one sometime, instead of with the rest of the team.”

“Sure,” Pidge agreed as Shiro and Allura glided out to join them.

Shiro was wearing a tuxedo, cummerbund, bowtie and all. He looked like some kind of movie star ready for the red carpet. Allura had her hair in a half-up style as well, though hers was far neater than Pidge’s; it was a large bun that had a jewelled comb stuck in it, and a few jewels were scattered about the rest of her hair. Her dress was a solid deep purple, and Pidge could have sworn that it was an exact match to Shiro’s cummerbund.

“Lance is inside with Hunk,” Allura said, smiling brightly at the guards who were stationed outside the gigantic banquet hall. She flicked a smirk over her shoulder at Pidge and Keith. “I just wanted to let you know ahead of time that Lady Hycinthia asked if the Paladins of Voltron could begin the dancing portion of the evening. I agreed. We’ll be dancing in the pairings we chose at practise, and Coran shall be Lady Hycinthia’s partner.”

Keith blanched, but before he could say anything, the last member of their group interrupted him.

“I am quite grateful for my dance companion, princess, thank you for that,” Coran called.

Pidge turned to see him come down the Castle ramp, his suit rather similar in cut to Keith’s, except that he had it fastened instead of left open, and it had ties instead of buttons. It was a lovely turquoise colour, paired with black pants and dark boots. He wore white gloves, and it seemed like he had trimmed his hair for the occasion, the sides shorn, a rakish curl falling across his brow.

Pidge clapped a little as he walked towards them. “Wow. You clean up really well, Coran.”

Coran gave her a deep bow. “Thank you for the compliment, milady.”

Pidge managed a curtsy with only a slight wobble. “My pleasure, good sir.”

“Well, now that we are all looking our best, shall we?” Allura said, taking Shiro’s offered arm.

“Wait,” Keith said.

They all turned to look at him, his expression serious. Pidge was about to poke fun at him for instigating what looked to be another *special* conversation, but she waited to hear what he had to say first.

“If this ends up being humiliating for me, then I get first dibs on the last of the orange goop.”

Pidge pointed a finger at him. “Um, no. If this turns out super embarrassing for you, then we will give you the chance to *fight us* for the last of the orange goop.”

“We still need to leave a little bit of it so Hunk can attempt to recreate it,” Shiro said, ever rational. “But yeah, I’m with Pidge. I think the two of us can take you.” Shiro was also very cool.

They all walked past the guards and made it into the entry hall, which was empty except for a few robotic sentries — there were the sounds of a massive crowd beyond the tall double doors. Hunk was there, leaning against a wall. He waved them over.

“Hey, apparently they want to announce us or something,” Hunk explained, shrugging. “We’ve been hanging out here waiting for you guys.”

“Where’s Lance?” Pidge asked.

“Just hitting up the bathroom to check himself one last time,” Hunk said with an eye roll.

“Hey, this is my first ball, nothing wrong with perfecting the look!” Lance complained as he came around a corner.

Pidge wanted to high-five Allura, but it would have to wait until later. This was *too perfect*.

Lance was dressed almost *exactly* like Keith; the same cuts to their suit jackets, the black pants, and sharp, shiny shoes. The difference was in the colour scheme. Lance’s jacket was a midnight blue, the lapels verging on black but not quite, and the faintest shimmer to them. His shirt was white, setting off his skin, and his collarbones exposed by one tastefully undone button. His pants were black, like Keith’s, but they were of a different material, and not quite as tight — instead, the straight line of them emphasized how long Lance’s legs were.

All in all, it was more than Pidge could have hoped for — Keith was looking like someone had just smacked him in the face with a wet fish.

While the goal of the night was to prove to Keith that Lance had feelings for him too, if Keith was motivated to say what he was feeling without said proof, that would also be acceptable to Pidge. After all, one should never dictate the results of an experiment; rather, one should set the variables and let it unfold freely as it would. The most honest and accurate conclusions arose that way.

“Wow, you guys look amazing!” Lance gushed, rushing in closer. “Dude. We’re gonna rock this joint!”

If he noticed the similarity in his and Keith’s outfits, he didn’t say anything about it — not surprising, since Pidge had long since noted that Lance oscillated between sneakily observant and blind as a brick. He inserted himself between Hunk and Pidge, casting a smile back at the rest. “Let’s do it!”

Allura stepped forward, speaking with a member of staff who had suddenly appeared — the person that was meant to announce them, Pidge guessed.

The princess nodded at them as the staff member disappeared back into the hall. “I’ll go first. Remember, best foot forward!”

The doors opened to a clear, high voice proclaiming, “*Princess Allura of Altea!*”

Being announced as the guest of honour at a grand ball was probably one of the coolest things that had happened to Pidge yet. After Coran, she and Hunk were introduced together. When she walked in, the bright yellow lights blinded her momentarily, but then she was greeted by the sight of many, many faces, familiar and strange — Celthrians, Deltris, Gyrotians, and others — smiling and cheering them on.

She spotted the table they were meant to be sitting at, on a pedestal slightly higher than the rest. Lady Hycinthia was already seated in the centre, though she had risen to clap along with everyone else.

Once Pidge and Hunk were up and seated, Keith and Lance were announced next.

Pidge watched as certain people of Deltris whispered and pointed, one pair actually showing the others sitting at their table a holo of Lance and Keith. All twelve Moon Elders, including Grand Moon Melquisor, stood up and applauded them with great enthusiasm, some of them *actually wolf-whistling*.

The Jeeroonian delegation was equally taken by Lance and Keith (who were both a little taken aback by the craziness surrounding their introduction, though Lance recovered quickly, shooting everyone a charming smile and finger guns). However, the Jeeroonians were a bit more star-struck than the rest, and Pidge could have sworn she heard the word *kiyeneh* said with breathless respect. They bowed deeply to the Red and Blue Paladins as they walked past.

And there was Ter-Rinel, smiling broadly and winking at Lance as he neared the Gyrotian tables. The Gyrotians gave the Red and Blue Paladin a synchronized salute, just like they had given Pidge and Hunk, but a few were leaning in to listen to the Deltris representatives, who were giving some very important information, accompanied by crude hand gestures that had Pidge choking on her own saliva.

Apparently Gyrotians could wolf-whistle as well. Pidge might have stumbled upon a universal signal — she made a mental note.

Shiro was the last, and he was introduced not only as the leader of the paladins, but also, “*A champion and a peerless warrior!*” Keith, Lance, Allura, Coran, Pidge, and Hunk all stood up with entire ballroom to give Shiro the standing ovation he deserved.

It took a long while for the crowd to settle, but once they did, Lady Hycinthia stood, her arms spread out as if to embrace them all. “I welcome you to our home world for what is, I hope, only the first celebration of our accomplishments. My wish is that perhaps we can make a tradition of this — and that we have more achievements to celebrate in the future. As it stands, I would like to let Princess Allura address you all, for she is the reason we stand here united today!”

An explosion of approval — roars, cheers, claps — as Allura stood, thanking Lady Hycinthia quietly before facing the giant ballroom and banquet hall filled with their allies.

“This celebration is a much needed affair, for the challenge we face is unlike any the universe has seen. The Galra have conquered too many. They have slaughtered and enslaved countless scores more. But they will not have us.” Raucous cheering. “They will not have any others who choose to join the Arco Iris Alliance. We stand united, the line drawn before us. A line they *will not cross, even if we die upon it.*”

Even more cheering, accompanied by foot stomping and chest slapping. It was amazing to behold.

Allura held up a hand. “But for now, let us bond together. Let us rejoice in these first few steps, for they are not small — many of us have only known of each other by name, and others we have just discovered. The universe grows smaller, and I am glad for it, for one can never have too many loyal friends. Let us eat, drink, and make merry!”

Whoops and applause, as the wait staff appeared from a few smaller doors along the left side of the room, serving food that was a mix of specialties from each of the planets gathered here. Pidge accepted her plate with a *thank you*, and considered the contents of it. She had a mild intolerance to shellfish and lactose, but thus far, she hadn’t encountered anything out here that had affected her.

Just to be safe, Pidge brought out her computer, scanning the food and reading the chemical breakdown of it — none of its contents appeared to be dangerous ...

“This is *great!*” Hunk said, his mouth full. “Man, we need to get some recipes before we go! And stock up our pantry!”

“Already on it, my young friend!” said Coran, his own computer out as he spoke to a chef.

Pidge grinned and set to enjoying her meal, while keeping one eye on Keith and Lance. The Red and Blue Paladins were eating and speaking to each other in low voices. Pidge couldn’t hear what they were saying, but whatever it was had Keith giving Lance one of his small and most genuine of smiles.

When the time came for the first dance (which Pidge considered one of the more official romantic variables of the experiment; the setting and outfits were merely the arranged environment), Pidge was more excited for Lance and Keith than she was nervous about her own dancing debut.

“In honour of our guests and of their homeland that they have departed from in order to defend all of us, we shall now have them open the dance, with a traditional song of Earth!”

Hips Don't Lie started playing, and Pidge collapsed forward into Hunk's arms, laughing too hard to breathe, let alone dance. Allura and Shiro had started dancing immediately, Allura's dress gathered up to allow her more freedom of movement.

Hunk began guiding Pidge even as he was cracking up too, and Pidge said, between giggles, “Seriously, this wasn't on *my* phone, so who was it?”

“Not me,” Hunk said, laughing as he spun Pidge out. “And I don't think it was Lance either — check it out.”

Pidge looked over Hunk's arms to see Lance and Keith.

They were dancing fantastically, even though Keith was beet red as Lance threw his head back, laughing uproariously. Then he tugged Keith in even closer. Keith kept right on blushing, but he also busted out some dance moves that Pidge did not remember them learning with Allura, so ...

“They've been practicing,” Pidge observed with a smirk. “Ah, Keith, still having trouble with his hips.”

“Look at Lance's face,” Hunk said. “I don't think I've seen him this happy since ... before.”

Lance spun Keith out, to the amazed crowd's delight, in a swift and fabulous manner, and when he spun him back in, he didn't let Keith part from him — instead, they kept dancing, barely any space between them, and considering Lance's ability to work his own legs and hips, Keith was looking more and more like he was going to explode into a million overheated pieces.

“This was probably one of my favourite pieces from the Earthlings’ selection,” Coran was explaining to Lady Hycinthia, who was flushing and listening closely. “I chose this as our introductory dance as it seemed to be the most buoyant and varied option.”

“It’s definitely ... passionate,” she said, eying Lance and Keith.

Pidge coughed out another laugh, smothering it in her sleeve as Coran and Lady Hycinthia danced by her and Hunk.

The song concluded all too soon, and Lance actually *dipped* Keith on the last few notes. Pidge would have gagged at the ridiculous cheesiness of it, if she weren’t highly invested in the outcome of this ridiculous cheese-fest of an evening.

The crowds had been on their feet all throughout, and as soon as the song finished, the dance floor filled up; a crazy fast beat kicked off — this one was definitely alien, but it wasn’t that far off from the Caribbean rhythms they had used to learn how to dance. Pidge peeked through the whirling bodies, and she saw Keith pull away from Lance, shaking his head as Lance was snatched by a young Deltris female who had grabbed the Blue Paladin’s free hand.

Pidge gave Hunk a look and then turned to move off the dance floor. They headed to Ter-Rinel, who was clapping along to the beat, dancing in her seat.

“That was wonderful!” she said as they approached. “Oooh, I need Lance to teach me that dance! It was ... entrancing.”

“Maybe later tonight — right now, we need you to find Mey-Foran.” Pidge tapped a few notes onto her computer. “Keith is going to retreat into a corner and never come out again, so this is her only chance to *meet* the famed Red Paladin.”

Ter-Rinel nodded. “Of course! My sister is so thrilled to be part of this!”

As Ter-Rinel disappeared, Hunk faced Pidge. “Keith is going to drive me crazy. Did you see him split off from Lance like that? Lance actually looked like he —”

“I *know*,” Pidge said, putting away her computer. She sighed and lifted her glasses, rubbing at her nose. “He isn’t making this easy on us or himself.”

Ter-Rinel reappeared with Mey-Foran, who resembled her sister in looks — the same sky blue skin, dark brown hair, sunset orange eyes — but Mey-Foran was shorter and curvier. She was already blushing, a purplish hue to her blue cheeks.

“Before we go on, I have to say ... Ter didn’t tell you this because ... Well, anyways, I need to say it — I kinda have a crush on the Red Paladin,” she said to Pidge, all in one breath.

Pidge winced, immediately feeling guilty. Ter-Rinel had said her sister would be eager to help them with their plan, but she hadn’t said *why*. “Oh, I’m sorry. If this is too —”

“No, no, not at all! It’s just a crush on a celebrity, but I’m still a little nervous about meeting Keith?” She blushed some more. “But being able to help him is an honour, and really, a silly infatuation won’t stop me from doing what you asked. I’m studying to be an actress, and this will be great practice!”

“You are way too nice,” Hunk said to her, shaking her hand enthusiastically. “Seriously, you are one of the nicest people I’ve ever met, even though we haven’t formerly met until today. Uh, I’m Hunk.”

“Oh, I know,” she said with a bright smile. “It’s an honour to meet you as well. And to help in this mission. A part of me still can’t believe that the Red and Blue Paladin *aren’t* ...”

“Yeah. You and the rest of the universe.” Pidge couldn’t hold back an eye roll. “If this works out, we’ll get you a medal. You have no idea how pig-headed these two are.”

“Then let’s set them straight, shall we?” She looked confused when Pidge and Hunk started laughing.

Keith was sitting at a now empty table in a distant corner. Mey-Foran approached. Pidge and Hunk lingered a couple of tables over; Pidge was watching Keith, and Hunk was looking over her head to the dance floor, which Lance had yet to leave.

“Hey, he’s dancing with one of the Celthrian ladies now — I guess they got over the dog comment.”

Pidge poked at Hunk. “I don’t suppose you could signal him over.”

Mey-Foran hesitated a little before squaring her shoulders and taking a seat next to Keith.

Keith was immediately on his guard, and Pidge could have hit him for the sullen look on his face. However, Mey-Foran was not deterred, and she grinned dazzlingly at him, saying, “Red Paladin, I would like to extend my most sincere and heartfelt wishes for your success in coming battles.”

“Thank you,” Keith said. “I’m ... glad to have it.”

“Wow, he is so awkward. How is he so awkward?” Pidge wondered.

“It’s about to get worse, or better,” Hunk said gleefully. “Incoming Lance.”

“I also wanted to tell you that I find you quite handsome, even though your small hands are a little off-putting. How do you manage with only five fingers?” Mey-Foran asked, sounding genuinely curious.

Keith gaped at her, and then down at his hands, the fingers flexing on the table. “I’m not sure? I mean, I find it weird that you have so many. Do you have seven toes too?”

Mey-Foran laughed, a very high, sweet sound. “No! Just six per foot. But you must type very slowly.”

“I don’t think so,” Keith said, relaxing somewhat. “But I guess you must type wicked fast in comparison.”

The Gyrotian girl nodded. “It’s fascinating, the differences between us. That must be part of why I find you so attractive.”

Keith openly stared again, his mouth parted, but no sound coming out. At that moment, Lance appeared, pulling up a seat next to Keith, throwing his arm out around the back of the Red Paladin’s chair.

“Wow. I bet he has no idea how that looks, does he?” Pidge said dryly, cocking her head.

Hunk had taken a seat as Lance swooped in, and Hunk braced his elbow on the back of his own chair, his chin resting on his hand. “Nope. This is going to be painful, isn’t it?”

“Keith, my man, look at you scoring with one of the prettiest ladies at his ball!” Lance winked at Mey-Foran.

She laughed off his flirting by putting her hands near Keith’s on the table. Pidge saw Lance’s eyes drop down and then flick right back up. *Interesting.*

“Lance, you’re a walking embarrassment!” Keith snapped at him. “We were just talking —”

“Sure you were, Mr. Quite Attractively Handsome — according to this fine lady here,” Lance said, leaning in to speak with Mey-Foran, inserting himself into Keith’s personal space. “Listen, he’s all withdrawn and stuff, but I promise he’s a really cool dude. And even when he’s being a jerk, he usually doesn’t mean it.”

Mey-Foran nodded. “You seem to know him quite well.”

“We’re Paladins of Voltron, battle-buddies and all that,” Lance said, his arm *still* around the back of Keith’s chair, still pressed in a little too close to Keith.

Keith wasn’t leaning back, but he also didn’t look too happy.

“If I were to attempt to woo him away, what do you think my chances would be?” Mey-Foran asked in a teasing tone, though she pressed in the tiniest bit closer to Keith as she spoke.

Lance pretended to think, casting a look towards the subject of their discussion. They were close enough for their noses to be about ten centimetres away from each other. Keith visibly swallowed hard, even as his eyes narrowed in his typical expression of annoyance.

“Probably not as good as they should be, considering how awesome you seem to be,” Lance said apologetically. “Also, we have a full-time saving-the-universe gig going on.”

Mey-Foran sighed dramatically. “I see.”

“He doesn’t even realize what’s going on, does he?” Hunk said sadly. “I’m hurting for Keith right now.”

“Yeah, the make-the-other-person-jealous romantic trope might only be effective if the other person *actually realizes they are jealous*.” Pidge pointed with one finger, uncaring of Lance noticing since he was not aware of *anything* right now. “Look at his body language. It’s ...”

“Yeah, like, it’s totally possessive and affectionate, and he hasn’t *leaned away yet, holy crow, Lance*.” Hunk covered his face with both hands. “Pidge, what do we even do?”

“Have Keith dump a glass of wine on Lance and help take off his shirt in the secluded bathroom?” Pidge suggested.

“As if Keith would take that idea.” Hunk snorted. “How about we find a mistletoe-like plant ___”

“As if Keith would go for *that*,” Pidge said. “How are we already running out of tropes to use?”

“Because we figured the dancing, and the fact we’re at a *freaking ball* where three quarters of the attendees are convinced Lance and Keith are having some great love affair, would be enough to get through to the densest Paladins to ever dense-up the universe,” Hunk rattled off. “Dude. Match-making is *hard work*.”

“This is more than that, this is *science*,” Pidge said grouchy. “We used up two of three our romantic variables already, and the last one hinged on them being provoked into speaking *alone* ...”

Lance finally shifted away from Keith (though his arm was still glued to the back of Keith’s chair). “You know what, man, you only live once, so you gotta grab every potential for a good time that you can! Why don’t you grab Mey-Foran — uh, politely and with her full consent — and take her out onto the dance floor? You’ve got some moves!”

Lance grinned at her. “I taught him everything he knows.”

Mey-Foran looked over at Keith, whose face was stone cold, and sighed. “You know what? I think I’ll pass. But you go on and have a good time. *Both* of you.”

With that, she stood up and walked away, giving Pidge and Hunk a rueful look. Pidge whipped out her computer, jotting down some quick observations, while also creating a reminder to write to Mey-Foran later, thanking her profusely. Also, she would ask Allura if Gyrotians appreciated flower arrangements or something.

“Okay,” Pidge said, not willing to surrender yet. “You need to talk to Keith. He needs a gently applied confidence boost. *I* am going to talk to Lance.”

“Yeah? Don’t break him,” Hunk said, though he sounded rather blasé about it. “I mean, not permanently, at least.”

Hunk drifted over to Keith and Lance, the latter standing up and walking away just as Hunk arrived and sat down. Pidge grabbed the Blue Paladin as he neared her, dragging him to the other side of the hall.

“Ow! Hey, Pidge, what’s your deal?”

“My deal is that you’re —”

She had no idea what she was planning on saying — Pidge didn’t want to tell Lance about Keith’s feelings, as that would be a betrayal that she couldn’t commit. Moreover, it would violate the rules she had set for herself at the beginning of this scientific endeavour — that Lance and Keith had to ultimately discover and act upon their feelings on their own, as Pidge tweaked only the circumstances surrounding them.

But Pidge’s half-formed words were cut off by Lance himself, his eyes narrowing and a hand coming up, silencing Pidge mid-sentence.

To their right was a noble-looking pair of Gyrotians speaking with someone from Mir.

“While it’s true that they are all great warriors, the hot-headed nature of the Red Paladin concerns me greatly.”

“Not to mention the lack of respect he holds for his lifemate. That is obviously very telling of his character,” said the man, his expression one of disgust. “He doesn’t even *speak* about —”

“Excuse me,” Lance chirped, smiling in a way that made Pidge instantly wary. “I have to interrupt, so there’s no confusion — Keith is an amazing fighter. He’s probably the *best* warrior, after Shiro. And that hot-headedness has saved our lives more than once. Just saying.”

Pidge nodded at Lance’s side, her face set in an unimpressed expression.

The man (an official, maybe? He had medals pinned to his suit) sighed, and took on a fairly patronizing tone as he said, “You’re young, and you may have taken a lifemate at too early an age, but your suspiciously silent Red —”

“Keith is an awesome lifemate,” Lance cut him off, brutal and uncompromising. “This might be a cultural thing, so pardon me if I’m messing up here, but on Earth, people who don’t speak their minds every five seconds are *valued and respected* just as much as jerks like me. We need people who actually take the time to *think* before they speak.”

Lance’s pointed look was not at all subtle. That was fine with Pidge.

“Hey, uh, guys, everything going okay here?” Hunk asked, appearing with Keith at his side.

Pidge immediately whipped around, eyes widening. She did not engineer this, she wouldn’t have ever had anyone bad-mouth Keith in any capacity ... But now she *needed to know* if Keith had overheard — specifically, if he had overheard Lance’s defense. If he had just heard Lance say that Keith *is an awesome lifemate*. Present tense. Implied possession. No denial.

But Keith’s face was unreadable, and Hunk just looked concerned.

The Gyrotians apologized, giving Keith a formal bow, and then drifted off ... Over to the Deltris tables, which seemed to be the gossip hot spot.

“That looked a little intense, dude. You okay?” Hunk put a hand on Lance’s shoulder.

“Yeah? Yeah. Just some people being jerkfaces. It happens all over the universe, apparently,” Lance said, shrugging and turning on his charming smile again. “Let’s go say hello to Imperator Fr’ellin!”

Pidge was still trying to sort out what had happened — trying to get Hunk’s attention, or Keith’s, to see if anything had changed, if the romantic components, both planned and unplanned, were having an effect — when quite suddenly, they were stopped by two Celthrians, tall, muscular, ... and armed.

The conversations nearest to them ceased.

“Paladins, I greet you. Commander Sheirene, at your service,” the woman said, saluting. “This is my comrade, Captain Wolrhen.”

The man bowed, saluting them when he rose up. Pidge never quite knew how to respond to military gestures, so she settled for a salute back. Keith nodded, Hunk did a combination wave/salute, and Lance bowed, though not quite as deeply.

“While we are quite honoured to be a part of this alliance, I’m afraid I’ll need to ask something of you, which may feel out of place,” the Commander said.

“What is it? Do we need to get the Princess, or Shiro —” Hunk began.

“No, nothing like that. It involves you, Paladin Lance,” Commander Sheirene said. “Before I was a Commander in our armed forces, I was a priestess in the Great Temple of Julthra.”

“Oh no,” said Pidge.

Julthra was one of the two canine gods of Celthrius.

“What? What’s happening, Pidge?” Lance asked nervously.

“As you are now considered an honorary Celthrian, I must challenge you to answer for the blasphemy you committed on your last visit to our world.” She sounded very contrite about it. “You may fight with the melee weapon of your choice. And you may choose a second. Captain Wolrhen is mine.”

“*What?*” Lance breathed out, eyes huge.

“Uh, what?!” Hunk yelled loud enough to get even more eyes and ears directed their way.

“Commander, surely there’s —” Pidge started.

But then Keith was marching over, standing just in front of Lance, his arms crossed. “You are not duelling him. Nobody deserves to die for one stupid comment.”

“It wouldn’t be to the death, that’s barbaric! It would simply be until second blood, as we say.” The Commander stood at attention. “Many in our religious forces felt there wasn’t enough answering for the slight. If he fought, it would go a long way in appeasing them, and in solidifying our alliance.”

Lance’s shoulders sagged here. “Right. Okay. Keith, it’s fine, this was my screw-up, and I ___”

“*No*,” Keith said. “You aren’t a screw-up. It was a dumb mistake any one of us could have made. And a melee fight isn’t fair.”

Lance didn’t appear to know how to respond to that. Pidge kept expecting him to push back, but he seemed confused now more than anything else.

“If you wanted to face him down on a rifle range, it would be a different story. Lance is one of the best sharpshooters around,” Keith said matter-of-factly. (Lance was now staring with open wonder.) “But to face him in something he isn’t an expert in — what honour is there in that?”

“It’s the traditional way to pay respect to our god, Red Paladin,” the Commander clarified. “What would you suggest that works within those bounds?”

She seemed to be honestly looking for an alternative. At this point, Allura, Coran, Shiro, and Lady Hycinthia appeared, all varying degrees of concerned, with Shiro and Coran looking the most anxious.

“I suggest that *I* take Lance’s place. I mean, I’d have the right to, as his lifemate ... right?” His voice faded in strength towards the end there, but he looked no less determined.

Pidge was pretty sure her expression was a mirror of Lance’s — pure, unabashed shock. Hunk’s mouth was hanging open. Coran’s fear subsided into a knowing smile. Allura seemed like she was fluctuating between pride at Keith’s words and fear at the consequences of them.

Shiro’s anxiety shifted into confidence, and he was the one who stepped forward to say, “If you accept Keith as your challenger, then could we resolve this quickly and relatively painlessly?”

“Yes,” Commander Sheirene said, her face giving away nothing. She glanced between Lance and Keith, and Lance seemed to shake himself out of his stupor as she did so.

“Then I’m going to be Keith’s second,” he said, squaring his shoulders and glaring at Keith.

Keith turned to scowl at him, and Lance glowered right back, no holds barred. It was fierce, it was protective, and Pidge could honestly feel *heat* coming off of *both of them*. She had never been more certain that they would be happy together, but she now also realized that they would be a force to be reckoned with ... *Good*, she thought with pride.

“Then shall we proceed outside?” the Commander said.

Keith reached beneath his jacket for his bayard. “Let’s.”

The both walked side by side outdoors. Lance followed after them, swiftly pursued by Pidge and Hunk, and Shiro, Coran, and Allura. And then, naturally, *the entire ballroom of aliens*.

“Pidge ... you, uh, didn’t arrange a duel, right?” Hunk said under his breath. “I get that a battle for your true love’s honour is, like, one the oldest romantic clichés ever, but —”

“Hunk, who do you think I am?” Pidge whispered back. “I’m ... I’m kinda freaking out right now.”

“Oh good, me too,” Hunk wheezed out. “So I’m not the only one that thinks this is totally insane. Great.”

The outdoor patio area was an enclosed park-like space, and as Pidge looked up, she realized the ballroom actually had a second floor with a balcony overlooking this miniature park — a balcony that was full to the brim with spectators.

Keith and the Commander found a clear section of grass, and the rest of the ball attendees surrounded them, just outside the boundaries of the square-shaped field. Allura and Lady Hycinthia were whispering to each other, and it took only a few moments for their discussion to end. Lady Hycinthia, apparently, was the decided spokesperson for this, and she stepped forward, between Lance and Keith, to address the crowd.

“This was not a scheduled part of the evening, so allow me to explain to all our non-Celthrian guests. Our honoured Blue Paladin, upon his first visit to our world, made a cultural blunder that was highly ... offensive, albeit completely unintentional. We have most of us chosen to forgive his unknowing blasphemy, and he has since apologized and learned from his mistake.”

Lance was looking miserably guilty again, hunching in on himself, but Keith shot him an angry look, as if to say *do not start*. And Lance, miracle of miracles, straightened his stance and tried to appear impassive, though the unhappiness was clearly present all the same.

“However, our religious authorities need more reassurance that the mistake will never be repeated, and the Red and Blue Paladins have agreed to abide by our laws. We are gratified for this, and we beg your patience. Once the matter is settled, the festivities may reconvene.”

Keith and the Commander were now eying each other, taking stock. Pidge gripped her own bayard tightly, though she left it in its holster.

“Whenever you are ready ... begin,” Lady Hycinthia said, retreating back into the mass of onlookers.

Keith, being Keith, released his bayard's blade, but not the shield, and ... didn't charge right away. Instead, to Pidge's surprise, he began a slow, circling walk around Commander Sheirene. The woman unsheathed a sword almost as long as Keith was tall. They circled each other for what felt like eons, but was likely mere moments, before Sheirene attacked — she leapt forwards, her sword reaching out with a jab.

Keith parried the blow, spinning in a wide arc back around, striking at Commander Sheirene's extended arm faster than she could pull her own sword back to block.

The slice appeared on her forearm, gushing a bit of red blood, and Pidge pumped a fist in the air. “Yes!”

“You show her, Keith!” Hunk yelled.

Suddenly, the throngs of aliens were joining in, the silence falling away to hoots and hollers. Keith grinned ferociously, and he *still didn't attack*.

“Looks like he’s finally learned something from our sparring matches,” Shiro said with satisfaction.

Commander Sheirene matched Keith’s grin with one of her own, and then the duel truly began. They spun wildly around each other, their foot work a rapid dance — faster than anything Pidge had ever seen, and far more elegant than any of the battles they’d been in. There wasn’t any need for brutality or dirty tactics. This wasn’t about survival, and so it was far more calculated and intricate.

Pidge could see Coran recording it on his personal computer.

“You are a skilled swordsman, Paladin,” Commander Sheirene complimented him as they slowed after a frantic series of clashes.

“Same to you,” Keith replied, and he ducked low, swiping at her knees with a foot; his bayard rose to catch a blow she rained down on him even as she evaded his trip. Keith didn’t quite manage to keep her in check, and the blade glanced off his sword, nicking his temple.

Pidge hissed, her worry spiking up again. Lance was standing just off to the side, and he jerked forwards, but Allura grabbed his arm, holding him back.

“Even!” Sheirene crowed. “Next blow goes to the victor!”

Keith growled and threw himself upwards, meeting her blade with his, and they were caught up in a contest of strength now. Sheirene was so much bigger than Keith ... But that didn’t matter because Keith twirled to one side, Sheirene’s momentum carrying her forward. She spun halfway around, her blade clanging against Keith’s, but Keith was on firmer footing, and so while she blocked his first blow, the second caught her across her back as she tried to turn to face him head-on.

The line that appeared, slicing neatly through her coat, was another splash of red.

And the cheer that went up — from everyone, including the Celthrians — was the equivalent of the bell calling the end of the match.

Sheirene grimaced as she straightened fully, but her smile was broad as she tucked her blade back in its sheath, extending a hand. “That was well-fought.”

“Thank you. And thanks for holding back,” Keith said with a small smile. “Normally that would tick me off, but I get that you didn’t really want to do this.”

“I did not restrain myself as much as you would think, young Paladin,” the Commander said, taking Keith’s hand in a firm grip. “That you would notice is another point to your character. You do yourself and your lifemate proud.”

“Right!” said Lance, appearing next to Keith, a *too* bright smile on his face. “This is over then? Great, awesome. Back to the dancing!”

He was looking at Keith and ... Pidge wasn’t sure what was happening there. It didn’t look bad ... but it didn’t look entirely good either.

Allura was speaking with Lady Hycinthia again, and the older woman raised her voice, gesturing with her hands. “Thank you for your indulgence — let us continue on with our celebrations! Please, everyone, back to the ballroom!”

As the crowd did as it was told, Pidge held back, keeping an eye on Lance and Keith, neither of which were moving.

“C’mon, Pidge,” Hunk said quietly. “Let’s let ’em talk.”

Shiro and Allura were already back inside. Coran was amongst the last few people to leave. Pidge followed Hunk reluctantly, feeling the silence from her two friends at her back.

She couldn't do it. She could not leave without seeing the outcome of this.

"Hunk," she said in less than a whisper. "Hunk, come here."

They were just outside the doors, partially concealed by a pillar. Hunk turned to face her just as she lifted her foot up onto said pillar, reaching into her boot.

"So that personal cloaking device you were wanting ..." Pidge pulled two small circular shaped machines from her boot. She clipped one onto the front of her dress and handed the other one to Hunk. "Wanna test it out?"

Hunk's face was a picture. He looked down at the machine. "Pidge. Pidge, no way. But also, *no way*. This is —"

"Hunk, I have worked really hard to make this happen. Well, *this* and *that* behind us. I'm not saying we record it or interfere or anything. I just need to *see it*, if it's going to happen at all. Which, at this point, it will happen if I have to punch them both in the face, science be damned."

Hunk gave one last look towards the inside of the ballroom and then sighed. "Yeah. Okay, I'll go be a horrible person with you."

"Great!" Pidge whispered. She pushed the button on her device and Hunk's at the same time.

A millisecond later, they were gone.

"Oh wow!" Hunk said excitedly.

"Shhh! They don't mask sound!" Pidge was already tiptoeing back to Lance and Keith, trying to find a decent spot — she knelt behind a small cluster of bushes (just in case her

cloaking device failed), and risked peeking around them, feeling Hunk approaching at her back.

Lance and Keith stood about a metre apart, staring at each other, and Lance was saying, "... with this whole thing. You ... haven't actually been mad. You've been weirdly accepting."

"I've been annoyed, you've seen it," Keith said, shaking his head, his hands flexing uselessly.

"Okay. Yeah. But ... Keith, you ..."

"You didn't deny it," Keith cut him off, his grey eyes focusing on Lance's face intently. "When that guy was bashing me for —"

"Crap, you heard that? Keith, he was being stupid, and you shouldn't —"

"I've heard worse from others," Keith dismissed. "The point is that you ... didn't deny it. You used it, you defended me with it."

"Yeah?" Lance was sounding *aggravated* now. "And you just used it to fight a duel for me. You fought a *duel for me*. What the hell were you thinking?"

"That I could help you out, you stubborn jerk." Keith's mouth pressed into a line between words. "What else did you think this was?"

"You wanting to show off, of course!" Lance said, his voice rising. "I couldn't — you weren't — oh."

Lance went silent, stunned. He was staring at Keith with wide eyes. Lance's hair, neatly combed before this, was now back to its usually ruffled state, made messier by the hand he lifted to run through it. Pidge could see Keith's irritation dying down, nervousness

reappearing. He shifted his balance, and he raised a hand to the blood streaking his forehead. Lance moved quickly, pulling a handkerchief out of his inside jacket pocket. “H-h-here.”

He offered it to Keith, and their fingers brushed. They didn’t move for a long moment.

“Is this for real?” Hunk said in the lowest voice he could manage, hardly more than a breath.

Pidge just nudged him into silence, her own eyes riveted to the scene.

Keith eventually yanked his hand back, using the handkerchief to wipe away the excess blood and then pressing it into the small wound with barely a wince.

“I ... I said you were a great rifleman. If this had been a shooting contest, I would’ve let you do it,” Keith said.

“While I resent the whole ‘letting me’ thing, I ... I’m letting that go because I need to ask you something.”

Pidge could have sworn Keith was looking exceptionally pale right now, though that may have been the silvery light coming from Celthrius’s two moons.

“Yeah? Uh, okay.” Keith removed the handkerchief, the small cut on his head mostly dry now. He tucked the small cloth into his own jacket pocket and stood still, waiting, his hands tightening into fists at his sides.

“A few months ago, you got really weird around me. You turned back into a jerk. I was a jerk back to you, for which I apologized, and you said sorry too, but ... You never told me why.”

“Lance, it was —”

“Don’t say it was nothing, or it has nothing to do with *me*,” Lance interrupted, frowning. “Because I’m pretty sure both of those are lies.”

“What does it matter? Things are good now, right?” Keith said, a little desperate. *A lot desperate*, Pidge thought, but he was restraining himself admirably.

“Yeah, yeah they are. But it’s bugging me ... If it’s something I did, I need to know what it was, so I don’t ever do it again,” Lance said, logical and plaintive. “Right?”

“You ... you didn’t do anything. Not really. It was all me.” Keith barked out a humourless laugh. “I was ... going through something. But I got it under control now. So you don’t have to worry.”

The sound Pidge heard from over her shoulder made her think that Hunk had just smacked his own forehead — quietly. Pidge covered her mouth to keep a vicious bout of swearing down.

“That’s not —” Lance began hotly.

“You don’t have to worry because I’ve figured out that I’m sort of in love with you, and there’s nothing either of us can do about it. So let’s just move on, okay?”

Hunk fell over. Thankfully, the grass muffled his landing. Pidge dropped her hands and mouthed wordlessly — her eyes were so wide they actually hurt.

Lance was a perfectly frozen statue.

As Keith spoke, he’d kept his eyes on Lance, but now they fell away, and he stared at the ground, a muscle jumping his cheek from how tightly he was clenching his jaw.

Pidge was willing Lance to move, to speak, to do *anything*. Keith looked like he was going to walk away *any second*, and that would be *it*. He'd lock himself up again, never speak to any of them ever, and it would be Pidge's fault for asking that he take a chance on this, risk his feelings and —

"That works, actually," Lance croaked out. He cleared his throat and tried again, his voice only slightly less raspy. "Because I'm pretty sure I've got the worst crush on you."

Hunk was still lying on the ground, but Pidge could hear him attempting to sit back up. Pidge didn't even bother trying to quiet him — Lance and Keith weren't hearing anything outside of their little bubble.

Keith had flinched when Lance had spoken, and then he jerked his head up, his eyes searching Lance's face frantically. His mouth opened, but it was a couple of moments before words fell out. "You ... you do?"

"I can't say that I'm in love with you," Lance said softly. "Because I just figured out I had crush on you like, ten seconds ago? But if you're willing to give me time to catch up ..."

"I did it in our training sessions," Keith said, his voice coming out stronger. "You're a fast learner."

"Probably still won't ever be as good as you," Lance admitted, and he winced as he said it. "Ugh. I guess having a crush on you doesn't make me any less annoyed at your stupid innate talent. Pfft."

"That's good, it'll keep you motivated. I'm not going to go easy on you, even if we are ..."

Keith faltered, his hand lifting to make a motion that meant something only to him.

Lance caught his hand, gazing at it for a few seconds before saying, "I believe the word you're looking for is *boyfriends*."

“Right. Yeah. We should probably talk about what *that* means. I don’t have ... any experience with it. Like, zero. I’ve barely even watched any movies that —”

“Dude, I got you covered. On the movie front. Actual experience? Zip.” Lance grinned suddenly. “That’s cool though. You and me? Great improvisers.”

“Yeah,” Keith breathed out, and he was finally, *finally* relaxing, his shoulders dropping, his fingers intertwining with Lance’s.

Pidge was not the squealing kind of girl unless there was some great new technological advancement to geek out over. But right then, it was taking all of her willpower to not to let out the highest, loudest squeal she would probably ever produce in her life. She had *done it*. They had all *done it*.

Lance was grinning like a loon, and Keith was smiling back, wider than Pidge had ever seen him smile.

The taller boy tugged on their linked hands. “So. Um, do we, like, hug now? Are we hugging-type boyfriends?”

Keith made a face. “I don’t know. I don’t particularly feel like hugging you right now.”

“Yeah, doesn’t feel right. What about dancing?” Lance smirked. “I *know* we’re dancing-type boyfriends ... Oh. *Oh*.” Lance’s expression went from smug to what could only be described as *devilishly gleeful*. “Holy crap, you were *dying* during the dance lessons, and I thought you were just embarrassed but you were *hot for me*, oh my —”

“I’m going to need you to shut up now.” Keith was flushing, but he seemed relatively unbothered by it. He started pulling on Lance’s hand, heading back inside. “Seriously, no —”

“You were getting all *caliente*, oh, man, if I had known what was —”

“There will be no dancing if you don’t shut your mouth *right now* —”

“Okay, all right ... But seriously, on a scale of one to *habanero*, how hot did you find me?”

Keith sighed long-sufferingly, and just as they stepped past the pillars, she could hear him say, “Actually, pretty hot — until *you opened your mouth again*.”

Lance sputtered incoherently as they disappeared back into ballroom.

Pidge clicked the button on her cloaking device, whipping around to see Hunk reappearing. He was lying on his back in the grass, both fists in the air.

“Pidge. We are the best in the universe. Bring on the Galra. Right now. We could kick their butts. I know we can. Because we just accomplished the impossible.”

“To be fair, Keith did most of the heavy lifting here,” Pidge said, falling back on the grass, smiling non-stop. “But I *cannot wait* to publish my paper on this. I was thinking of transforming this dissertation into a screenplay or something. Want to help with that?”

“Aw yeah,” Hunk said, sitting up. “Dude, let’s found our own interstellar film company.” He then stood up, helping Pidge to her feet and walking back to the ballroom with a spring in his step. “We would make crazy money from this one movie alone, allowing us the freedom to make artsy sort of movies about like, people who make ladders for a living but can never climb past their obstacles or some other metaphorical —”

The walked in and stopped in their tracks. They both stared at the dance floor, hearing the strains of some rock song that Pidge knew, but didn’t remember the name of.

“They are doing a rumba to *Hot Blooded*,” Hunk said in a flat tone of voice. “Pidge, I take it back. This was a mistake. A horrible mistake.”

Lance was laughing so hard that he was almost missing his steps — almost. Keith was actually keeping them in time, and *he* was the one who yanked Lance in close until there was no space for even light to get through.

And Lance, Lance went so red that Pidge was both surprised and elated to see him actually embarrassed, for once. Though that didn't stop him from deploying his hip maneuverers. Now Keith was blushing, but he didn't stop. Neither of them stopped. Lance started belting out the words, in a deliberately off-key voice, while Keith just laughed right along with him.

The Deltris were going insane, taking way too many pictures and recordings. Pidge was fairly certain that this new Red and Blue Paladin material was going to sell for a ton of money back on Deltris.

Allura, Shiro, and Coran joined Pidge and Hunk on the sidelines of the dance floor.

“Did they —” Shiro started

“Yup,” Pidge said.

“So they're really —” Allura began.

“Uh huh,” Hunk said.

Coran clapped his hands. “Well then, mission accomplished?”

“Yes,” Hunk and Pidge said together.

Shiro was looking happy, but there was anxiety creeping in too.

Pidge poked him a little. “What’s up?”

Shiro glanced down at her. “Remember how bad I was at talking to you about relationship stuff? I just realized now I *have to* with Keith. And Lance.”

“I’ve already spoken to Keith about the nature of their relationship — I told him that I didn’t truly believe they would be distracted, though they would have to be doubly aware during missions to keep the personal and professional separate,” Allura said confidently. “I only said that on Mir to —”

“Yes, that is important, but ...” Shiro drifted off, shifting uncomfortably. “I don’t suppose you Alteans have protec—”

Pidge grabbed Hunk’s hand. “Let’s dance!”

She yanked him out onto the floor just as the song switched to something cheerful and alien.

“What was that?” Hunk asked, confused as Pidge arranged their limbs into proper dancing posture.

“That was me not willing to hear Shiro and Allura discussing space condoms,” Pidge said, grinning when Hunk started choking on nothing.

They glided past Lance and Keith as the music changed again — this time into a melodic ballad. *This* had been a part of the original plan, assuming they could have gotten Lance and Keith onto the dance floor together somehow. But now it was just ... a celebration, Pidge supposed.

The slow song had Lance wrapping his arms around Keith, pulling him in and smiling down at him, unbearably happy. Pidge figured he was well on his way to loving Keith — but this

experiment showed Pidge that Lance would probably be the last one to know.

Keith looked up at him, his face a study in wonder. There was that edge of doubt there, the tinge of fear. But that was something for Lance to take care of.

Lance leaned down to whisper into Keith's ear. Keith closed his eyes and listened. Then he replied, sending Lance into a fit of giggles that had him burying his head in Keith's shoulder.

"This is way too cute," Hunk said, smiling fondly. "I'm pretty sure I'm going to be dry heaving into my breakfast on a daily basis."

"Yeah," Pidge sighed. "But *so worth it*."

"Because you were right?" Hunk said wisely.

"Because I was right. And because science totally saved the day."

"Right, science."

"*Yes, science.*"

Pidge rode the high of a hypothesis proved correct right to the end of the night, when they all crawled back to the castle just as the morning sun began to dawn. She ended her scientific observations with one last press of her cloaking device, watching with a tired smile as Lance walked Keith to his door before continuing down the hall to his own bedroom.

Keith stretched out a hand, pulling Lance back by his elbow.

"What —"

Keith reached up, his other hand resting lightly on Lance's neck as he slowly reeled him into a kiss.

Lance was once again frozen, but his eyelids fluttered shut quickly, and his arms were sliding around Keith's back. It was simple, a press of lips, a tilting of their heads when the angle wasn't quite right, bumping their noses as they figured things out and then lingered together, their mouths barely moving. They pulled away at the same time, Lance licking his lips and his entire face pink.

"Uh. Right. Um."

Keith was also self-conscious, but he was grinning at Lance's fumbling. "Good night, Lance. Don't forget we have training tomorrow after lunch."

"Uh huh. Training. I — am going to bed before I say something really stupid."

Keith laughed and pushed him away. "Too late, always too late."

"Screw you, Red!" Lance called over his shoulder.

Pidge watched them turn away from each other, matching dopey smiles on their faces.

She retreated back to her room, collapsing on her bed with her computer. There was no point in sleeping tonight, as tired as she was.

She was going to write up this whole thing. She had all the notes and observations she needed. Whenever Pidge finally got it published, she was going to submit it to Keith and Lance ... as a wedding gift.

Pidge glanced around the room surreptitiously, then lifted a pillow and buried her face in it.

And then she squealed loud and long.

Chapter End Notes

And here comes the list of inspiration for this chapter!

The first song Lance danced to that made him work his hips: [Oye Como Va, by Celia Cruz](#).

The song Keith was kinda embarrassed about (thank you to *Illusion* for introducing this awesomeness to me!): [Trouble by Valerie Broussard](#).

The song that Lance and Keith did a rumba to when everything was finally rainbows and puppies: [Hot Blooded by Foreigner](#).

And finally, these [two pictures](#) will show you what Keith was wearing.

And Lance's outfit was quite similar, just different colours and such.

Whew.

One more chapter, I think, and I'm done right before Voltron comes back this Friday! Hopefully I can finish it before then. Thank you so much for your amazing comments, kudos and everything! *hugs for everyone*

Come find me on [Tumblr](#) if you so wish :) And again, comments are wonderful, motivational things ;)

The Conclusion

Chapter Summary

In the end, we have yet more aliens shipping Lance and Keith, Pidge and Hunk regretting all the things that led to space boys being sappy with each other, and the space boys themselves being ridiculously and incandescently happy.

And Pidge has finished her dissertation. Thus, science has won the day.

Chapter Notes

If you thought the last chapter was too fluffy, you are not prepared for how over-indulgent this will be. My inner fangirl refused to be tamed.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Location: Hyrule System

Date: 297 Days of Voltron

Investigation of Known Pirate Presence

“Avast, ye swabs!” Lance crowed.

“No, Lance.” Pidge sighed. “*They’re* the pirates. We’re the good guys trying to *stop* the pirates.”

“Can’t we be privateers then? The sort of *good* kind of pirates?” Lance replied, and Pidge could swear she heard a pout in his voice. “I *never* get to use my pirate vocabulary.”

“Yes, how sad is that,” Hunk grunted out as the Yellow Lion took a hit from a missile. “Huh. That guy packs a punch. Shiro, what’s the deal?”

“I’ve almost got their Captain!” their leader called out, the Black Lion chasing the main ship with a ferocious roar Pidge felt in her bones — the lack of sound in space meant she only heard it in her helmet, but that was more than enough.

Pidge and her Green Lion fired a highly focused blast at the smaller ship they were chasing, and Pidge pumped her fist in the air when her new EMP bomb took out the ship’s main functions. It was a targeted pulse, leaving only the most basic systems intact — life-support, short-range communications, and thrusters. No more wormhole abilities. No more weapons.

“I was first to catch mine!” Pidge called, grinning as multiple screens opened up on her display, showcasing the faces of her fellow paladins. “That means I get first dibs on food today!”

“Well, there went the good leftovers,” Keith said with a sigh.

“I don’t even care that *I* lost. Pidge kicked *your* ass, *pookums*.” Lance snickered.

“No,” Hunk moaned, and he actually took one hand off his controls to face-palm.

“Stop,” Pidge said flatly. “Not this again.”

Keith just rolled his eyes.

“I am not stopping until he *picks a nickname*,” Lance said, the last few words filled with irritated determination. “If he would have just let me call him *babe* —”

“Absolutely *not*,” Keith said while executing a fancy maneuver that put him right behind his quarry. The pirate ship fired on him with its rear blasters, but Keith avoided them easily.

“Why do I even need a cutesy nickname —”

“Because it’s one of those awesomely terrible things about being boyfriends, *my sweet baboo*.”

“Nooooo,” Hunk whined. “Keith, just say yes to something so at least he sticks to *one* horrible gag-worthy term of affection —”

“I’m not giving in,” Keith ground out. “You can stuff it, Lance.”

“Oh, I love it when you go for the innuendo, *stud muffin*.”

“Damn it, you know I didn’t —”

“And it’s even better when you don’t mean it, *pumpkin butt*.”

Pidge might actually cry at this point. She flew her lion after the stubborn little boat-like ship that was pestering the Yellow Lion. “Hunk, if I say that I regret everything —”

“Then it would be the fifty-second time you’ve said it, and my fifty-second time *agreeing with you*,” Hunk said miserably. “Lance, you are the *worst*.”

The ship Pidge had crippled was launching a small shuttle that was rushing to join the large flagship Shiro was pursuing. Soon after, the other ships rallied around their Captain, unleashing a volley of lasers and missiles that the Lions had to work at avoiding.

“Crap, focusing again!” Lance shouted. “Listen, Shiro, if we all fire on —”

“Yes, do it!” Shiro said, firing at the Captain’s ship and narrowly missing.

“Everyone, the ship with the sun on the hull — those missiles are guided and damn annoying, so start there!” Lance called out authoritatively.

Using evasive tactics while concentrating on one tiny spacecraft was tough, but they managed to take out the sun ship’s engine.

“The guy with the mounted laser cannons!” Hunk led the charge with the Yellow Lion.
“Yeah, how do you like that, matey!”

“Hey, how come Hunk can do it?” Lance complained as he clipped the next craft’s thrusters.

Suddenly, the two ships they had just stranded in space released two more shuttles — and just like the previous one, they made a beeline for their Captain’s ship, somehow managing to dock even as the Captain made some insanely complicated motions to avoid Shiro and the Black Lion.

The last couple of pirate crafts followed the shuttles, clearly bailing on the battle in favour of joining with their leader. Abruptly, all lasers and missiles ceased firing. The Captain’s ship stopped attacking and slowed to a lazy float.

On Pidge’s screen (and probably the others’ as well) there was a sudden buzzing as the Green Lion accepted a transmission from the pirates. The Captain herself appeared on their displays, her face covered in scars, but clearly recognizable as a female from the planet Mir. She grinned wildly at them, saluting with one of her four arms.

“Well then, Paladins, I’m smart enough to know when I’m outmatched, and we don’t want any blood on our hands, especially our own. My crew aren’t a murdering bunch — just thieves and smugglers.”

“That’s appreciated, Captain,” said Shiro. “But you are thieving and smuggling much needed food and medical supplies. The war is coming to this system soon, and what you’re stealing is going to others who are already under siege.”

“Noted,” the Captain said, conceding so easily Pidge was actually annoyed — what was the point of the whole battle, then? “If we surrender peacefully, you are welcome to board my ship and take back what’s yours. With the understanding that there may be ... other items that I will most definitely be keeping.”

Shiro nodded. “I’m not interested in your other contraband, Captain —”

“Beatru,” she said.

“Captain Beatru,” Shiro finished. “Just what you took from the Deltris and Jeeroonian transports.”

“Then you’ve an invitation for drinks on me, Black Paladin! You and your crew are all welcome!” She waved as she logged off.

“Um, is it a trap?” Hunk asked warily. “They might have been on the ropes, but they didn’t feel done to me?”

“Captain Beatru isn’t a blood thirsty sort, according to Coran’s report,” Shiro said, already preparing his Lion to dock with the largest ship. “Who else is coming with?”

“Eh ... I think I’ll keep watch out here,” Hunk said. “In case they try anything.”

“I wanna see the inside of a space pirate’s ship!” Lance swung his Blue Lion towards Shiro. “Shiver me timbers!”

Keith sighed heavily. “I’m coming too.”

“Me next!” Pidge said, now excited by the idea of something *new*. Maybe there were some cool and *illegal* robots on that vessel? That would be such a score. She could probably arrange a trade. She had perfected her personal cloaking devices — a bunch of thieves would surely like those? Shiro might object, but if Pidge was sneaky about it ...

“Welcome aboard the *Busty Barwench!*” Captain Beatru hollered at them as they entered. “As you can see, she’s well-endowed and fond of alliteration!”

Pidge stared — the Captain wasn’t wrong about that first part. Beatru was tall, busty, and clutching what looked like a bubbly alcoholic beverage in one of her two right hands.

“Pirates are the same all over the universe, huh?” Hunk’s voice was in Pidge’s helmet, sounding a touch freaked out. “How goes your study on the comparability of Earth historical and cultural norms and how they are suspiciously present all over the sentient populations of the universe?”

“It’s going a little too well,” Pidge said, taking a surreptitious picture of the Captain. “I’m beginning to do that thing where I’m seriously considering that I’m in a coma and imagining this entire reality, thereby explaining all the similarities and call-backs to Earth.”

“Oh great, now I’m doing it too,” Hunk complained. “I hate questioning my reality, Pidge. Thanks for that.”

“You’re welcome,” she said as Shiro stepped forward, his cybernetic hand flexing. “You don’t have to stay on the line. We’ll bother you if we need you.”

“Copy that. I’ll just play on my computer. Thanks for downloading that Gyrotian Tetris thing for me, by the way. I think I’m about to beat Mey-Foran’s high score, and she’s going to be *so* ticked off. It’ll be great!” And then Hunk’s voice was gone. Pidge took off her helmet, almost in perfect tandem with Lance and Keith, grateful for some fresh (well, recycled, but it *felt* fresh) air on her sweaty face and neck.

“Thank you, Captain — I’d like to request that you and your crew keep your weapons locked down while we’re here,” Shiro had been saying while Pidge quietly conversed with Hunk.

Shiro was doing a very good job of keep his eyes level with the Captain's; this was especially impressive considering the low-cut top and corset-like apparatus around her torso. And the *jiggling* when she broke out in laughter.

“So formal! Come in, have a drink, then you can have your cargo and be on your way!” She stepped back and allowed them room to leave the airlock that connected the Lions to the ship.

When Pidge entered the threshold, she had to take a second or ten to gawk.

Captain Beatru's *Busty Barwench* (the alliteration *was* pretty fun) was draped in fine red and gold fabrics, the floors resembling sparkling granite, and the electrical panels and viewscreens hidden behind intricately carved wooden screens. The level of ostentatiousness was extraordinary — Pidge was quite suddenly toying with the idea of redecorating her room on Castle because *why not?* Why be boring when you can *obnoxiously opulent?*

“Holy crap,” Lance breathed out. “Hunk's missing out, he would have loved this.”

Keith stood next to Lance, his eyes flicking about, taking in the luxury absently, as he was most likely checking for traps. Pidge let him worry while she savoured the surroundings.

Lance glanced over at the Red Paladin and elbowed him lightly. “Hey, *lovebug*, take a sec to smell the roses.”

Keith gave him an unimpressed look. “I might if you cut it out with the stupid names.”

Lance shook his head, smiling with infuriating cheerfulness. “Nah, it's way too much fun to see you get all bothered.”

“The cargo hold is this way, and so is the bar,” Captain Beatru said, beaming with pride as they all gaped at her extravagant ship.

Shiro took the lead, and Lance rushed to follow him, turning back to blow a kiss and to mouth something that looked like *boogybear* at Keith. Pidge felt like her eyes were in danger of being permanently stuck in an upward position from how often she was rolling them lately.

“I think I made a mistake,” Keith said in a low, pained voice. “How about I go back to pining? It was bearable. Kind of.”

“As if,” Pidge scoffed. “The only thing worse than Lance being all lovey-dovey is you being sad and self-flagellating all over the Castle.”

Keith walked along side her, still constantly shifting his gaze, tilting his head at every click and groan the ship made around them. “Yeah. Maybe not as easy as I thought.”

“And you’re stupidly happy too,” Pidge said, unable to hold back a grin as she looked up at him. “Plus, I don’t think you can go back to not being able to make-out with Lance every time you beat him in the training arena.”

“Wait, *how* do you know about that?” Keith demanded, his gaze now zeroing in on her. “I thought you’d stopped spying on us!”

“First off, I was never *spying*, I was *observing for the sake of a scientific endeavour*,” Pidge corrected, somewhat offended. “And secondly, you always say we’re welcome to join or watch whenever you guys train. Trust me, I’ve learned my lesson — I leave right before your program ends. Seeing you and Lance play tonsil hockey is not a vital or desired part of my battle tactics learning.”

Keith didn’t blush quite as much anymore, but he was definitely going a little pink now. “Right. You’re right. Now, please, can we —”

“Ah, thank you, Lesllir!” Beatru said (and her voice was nearly always *booming*). “Everyone, this is my first mate. Lesllir, our opponents, the great Paladins of Voltron.”

“Good to meet you!” the first mate said in a more subdued tone, but nearly as sunny as her Captain. She was a Gyrotian, her skin a beautiful shade of sapphire blue, and her irises a dark green. Those eyes were flicking between the Paladins ... and they lingered on Lance and Keith.

Pidge hid a grin as Keith turned to glare at her. He was becoming increasingly observant lately, and he was particularly sensitive to furtive stares and comments about him and Lance. Speaking of observant — Lance was wandering off, staring at the huge selection behind the bar that was part of the cargo area.

“Holy ... Didn’t Coran say that Meddich ale was *lethal* to most sentients?”

“That’s only true if you drink it straight!” the Captain said jovially. “If you mix it in with some fruit and a good spot of tonic, you’ve got yourself a fine cocktail. Want one?”

“Yes,” Lance said at the same time Shiro said, “Maybe another time.”

Keith grabbed Lance by the back of his armour and pulled him away from the bar. “If you get poisoned, I will not be dragging your sorry carcass back to the Castle.”

“Please, you *so* would.” Lance leaned into Keith a little here, giving him a sweet smile.

Keith’s expression of irritation melted into fond exasperation. He leaned right back against Lance, just for a moment. Then he pushed him playfully.

“All right, guys, help me catalogue this stuff, will you?” Shiro called to them, ignoring the small shoving war that broke out between Keith and Lance as they raced towards their leader.

Shiro had been very indulgent with the Red and Blue Paladins, allowing them to get away with their flirtatious arguing in all but the most serious of situations. Pidge figured he was

going to keep letting them slide on this for a long while yet, since Shiro went all soft and brotherly around this shiny new *happy* Keith.

Pidge couldn't blame Shiro for it. Even she was inclined to keep her complaining to strictly words, no action or real aggravation behind it all, because seeing Lance so over the moon, and Keith quietly exuding joy all over the place ... It made her want to protect them. The reality was that the Galra were coming, and who knew how long Keith and Lance could have this, have each other, with no imminent danger. How long could any of them tease and joke and groan over it all before ...

She shook off the dark thoughts and followed Lance and Keith, her computer out and displaying the long list of supplies that had been steadily disappearing over the last couple of weeks.

"Pidge, I see most of the medical supplies ..." Shiro started opening the crates to ensure the contents were present.

"Too bad about those — the amount of cash in offloading pharmaceutical goods to dealers ..." The Captain sighed. "Oh well."

The pirates had gotten rid of any tracking devices or barcodes that would identify their cargo as stolen, so Pidge used her computer to scan each box as it was opened, taking a quick inventory on a chemical level, confirming that everything was there and had not been tampered with.

Lance was doing the same with the food crates, Keith using his computer to scan everything and check it off the list — Pidge could see their progress on her device as well.

"I just don't understand why *Red* isn't good enough for you," Keith was saying as they opened the last couple of boxes. "I'm okay with that one."

"It's fine for *buddies*, which we still are, don't get me wrong," Lance said patiently. "But it doesn't feel ... *boyfriendly* enough for me. Especially now that we've been together for a while."

Keith sighed again, and this time, as he turned away from Lance to scan a crate, Pidge could see the grin that he was hiding from the Blue Paladin. “Look, if you actually start giving me some names that aren’t vomit inducing, then I *might* be willing to give in.”

“Yeah? Yeah!” Lance’s excitement was almost cute to Pidge. “All right then ... Sort of sad to see the super gooey ones go ... But I’ll give it a shot.” He put down the lid of the crate he’d just opened, invading Keith’s space to speak directly into his ear, quiet and raspy. “*Gracias, querido.*”

Keith flinched, his head whipping around, nearly bumping into Lance’s. He stared, lips parted; Lance’s eyes dropped down to gaze at Keith’s open mouth. Pidge looked away because *no thank you, seen enough of that to last me a lifetime.*

“Wait ... what are these?” Shiro was staring down into one of the medical supply crates, holding up what looked like a blanket ... with two very distinct Red and Blue figures on it.

Pidge stared. She smiled. Soon enough, she was grinning. And then she was laughing, bent over double.

“What’s so ... oh no. *No.*” Keith looked over in horror at what Shiro was holding and down into the crate Lance had just opened. His high-pitched groan did not help Pidge calm down.

“Ah, those would be some of them items we procured that would be of no help to you,” the Captain said, and her grin was just as wide as Pidge’s.

Pidge was trying not to fall over; she stumbled over to the same crate Keith was staring down into while looking like his world had come to an end. She braced herself against the box, and took a glance herself. Mistake. Big mistake. Shiro wandered over and stood just behind her, and then *he* started laughing, though he quickly smothered it when Keith’s outraged glare hit him full on.

“Captain, Captain Beatru!” Pidge was giggling too hard to ask for *several copies*. But once she got over the sight of a crate full of holos, showcasing Lance and Keith in all their arguing, dancing, disgustingly-in-love glory (some of which were taken before they were *officially* in love, which was *even better*), she would make herself heard.

“Where are you even selling these?” Shiro asked. His eyes were twinkling and his mouth was struggling to stay in a straight line. His voice sounded like it was on the verge of cracking.

Pidge just let herself giggle into tears.

“Oh, it’s the talk of the galaxy! Very high demand all over!” Captain Beatru gave Lance and Keith a wink. “I rather hoped you would be the ones to catch us. Wanted a look at the famous Red and Blue Battling Lovers myself.”

“Oh, please tell me that’s their formal title!” Pidge gasped out, the muscles in her face *aching* from mirth.

“It’s the one I’ve heard most on Deltris,” Captain said, her own grin growing wider. “I must say, in battle you are quite formidable. I knew I stood no chance against Voltron, but I had to see ... And getting to meet you in person? All the better!”

She rummaged around the crate, yanking out a roll that she unfurled, revealing a *life-sized poster* of Lance and Keith pressed in close on the dance floor of the Celthrian ballroom.

“If you sign a few of these, I may cut you in on the profits!” the Captain proposed, whipping out a thick pen from seemingly nowhere.

Pidge was done laughing herself sick, but she couldn’t stop smirking for the life of her. Lance snatched the pen up, but Shiro moved in, taking the writing utensil from him and handing it back to Beatru.

“While that is a generous offer, I’m afraid we must decline. We have all that we need, thank you.” Shiro turned to Pidge, Keith, and Lance. “All right, team, let’s get these onto my Lion and head back to the Castle.”

“So soon? I understand, of course, busy saving all of us from the Galra,” she said, waving off Shiro’s apologies. “But if I can’t have some signatures, how about a holo?”

She had her personal computer in hand, holding it up to Lance and Keith. “One quick holo! I promise to never hit up another supply transport again!”

“Well, I don’t believe that, but ...” Keith, to everyone’s surprise, turned to Lance and asked, “You cool with this?”

Lance blinked rapidly. “What? Really?”

Keith shrugged. “Yeah, why not? You’re on *a space pirate ship*, Lance. Let’s commemorate the moment.”

Pidge whistled lowly. “You’re about to regret this, Keith.”

She was proven right in exactly two point three seconds when Lance, shooting a smirk in the Captain’s direction, grabbed Keith around the waist and activated his rifle-bayard. “Quick, grab some of your crew, have them look really menacing and —”

“Oh yes!” Captain Beatru said, bouncing on her feet. “Excellent idea!”

In short order, several space pirates were lined up, waving their *swords* and *electrified* bo staffs while glowering at Lance and Keith. (Pidge pinched herself to reassert the fact that yes, *this was her reality*.) The Red Paladin, looking distinctly *done* with everything, was wrapped up in Lance’s left arm, pressed in against the Blue Paladin’s side. Lance held his rifle out and tried to force his facial expression into one of cool superhero-like poise, but he kept cracking into a giddy grin.

“All right, Lance?” Captain Beatru was gleefully taking several pictures at this point. “Trying grinding your teeth a little, and Keith, boy, you need to be less aggressive ... or you can scowl your little heart out, that works too. Makes it look like you’re still in this fight even though your beloved is saving you from the dread pirates.”

There was some love-struck sighing from the aforementioned dread pirates, but they all immediately acted as though nothing happened and resumed their fear-inspiring expressions and poses.

“One last one!” the Captain said a minute later. “Shealyn, Kirif and Hyliun! Get on the floor and play dead. Lance, put your foot on Kirif’s belly, and ...”

“Oh, I got this. C’mere, honeybunch!” Lance said, pointing his rifle towards the floor and sweeping Keith in again.

Keith resisted this time. “No way. Not happening. Also, *honeybunch*? You said you wouldn’t —”

“Right! Sorry, hard habit to break now,” Lance said, genuinely contrite. “But, c’mon, for me? Lemme pretend that I just wasted a whole pirate ship’s worth of murderous scallywags, and now I get a kiss from my lad-love as a reward!”

Shiro was leaning against a wall, arms crossed and face finally showcasing his amusement with this whole scenario. When Keith shot him a desperate and silent plea for help, Shiro just shrugged. “It’s your call, kid. Gotta say, you make for an unconvincing dude-in-distress.”

“I think it adds to the charm of it, personally,” Beatru said thoughtfully.

“Sometimes I really don’t understand why I ... You know what, *fine*, but” — Keith activated his sword, swinging it down to nearly decapitate one of the pirates, who squeaked in fear — “this time I’m joining in on the pretend wasting of pirates.”

“I’m your hero, and you’re mine,” Lance agreed, eyes glinting. “You would fight a whole ship of pirates for me?”

“Lance, I *actually* fought off a dozen bounty hunters for you a month ago, and nearly lost an arm to that freaking pet dinosaur-thing of theirs, and right now, I’m taking corny pictures that are going to be sold to millions of aliens around the universe, which is *a far greater* sacrifice, you jackass.”

The mood shifted abruptly, and Pidge, who had been going back and forth between laughing at them and mocking them viciously, now felt like she was intruding, like this was *private*.

Lance’s eyes were darkening. He pressed in even closer, his mouth all but brushing against Keith’s as he murmured, almost too softly to be heard (and Pidge wished she *hadn’t heard it*), “I’m very *appreciative* of what you’re willing to do for me, *querido*. Trust me, you’ll be getting thanked thoroughly *later*.”

Pidge groaned and slapped her own forehead while Shiro coughed and busied himself with attaching the anti-grav supports to the crates, linking them all together and re-sealing them. Captain Beatriu gave a whistle (*there it was again, how did the whole universe use that in the same way?!*) and fanned herself. A moment later, she started taking a whole new barrage of pictures.

Keith swallowed hard just as Lance swooped in and kissed him. This was almost as bad as the few make-out sessions Pidge had stumbled across. No, it was *worse* because somehow Pidge was stuck here, in shock and unable to move.

Keith’s eyes shut immediately, and his free hand was in Lance’s hair, gripping tightly at the back of his head. Lance had his hands full — one with the rifle, the other around Keith’s waist — yet he managed to gross Pidge out further by pushing a little with his body, getting Keith to dip back the slightest bit, deepening the kiss as he did so, apparently catching Keith off-guard because he made a noise that Pidge was already in the process of erasing from her memory.

“Okay, that’s enough, guys, please.” Shiro sounded as pained as Pidge felt. Good, misery loved company. She couldn’t wait to show these holos to Hunk — particularly the ones that were high-definition and infinitely looping. If *she* had to have the image of Lance’s tongue in Keith’s mouth seared into her brain, then *so did Hunk*, who had so wisely chosen to stay behind. He would not escape unscathed, no, Pidge would not allow it.

“Yes, that is enough, bless,” the Captain said. “Are you sure you don’t want me to share the wealth? Because you are about to make me extremely wealthy. There were a few naysayers who didn’t believe this was a real thing, and I’m going to clean up on several bets in the Intergalactic Gambling and Games Arena, not to mention how much the vendors on Deltris would be willing to shell out to have *this* in their stores ...”

“Just give me a few copies and we’re square,” Lance said breathlessly.

Keith didn’t say anything, his face red as he turned to help the pirate crew up onto their feet. Some of them were shaking his hand enthusiastically, while others were ducking and unwilling to meet his eyes, a diverse range of coloured blushes painting cheeks and necks. A couple more pirates were *leering*, and that had Keith scowling threateningly, causing them to laugh and back off with raised hands.

Pidge wanted to go back to the Castle and design a real and safe version of *brain bleach*.

After Captain Beatru sent them back to their ships (with several holos, her contact information in case they ever needed anything smuggled or stolen, as well as a small crate of Meddich ale), Pidge retreated into her Lion and uploaded the holo directly to Hunk’s Lion just to make herself feel better.

The sound of wrecked wailing put a satisfied (and sadistic) smile on her face as they flew back to the Castle.

Castle of Lions

Date: 342 Days of Voltron

Dining Hall at Dinnertime

“Okay, but I’m honestly okay with the orange goop being our staple food for now,” Hunk was saying as Pidge entered the hall. “I’ve managed to successfully recreate it a few times. Until we get hydroponics up and running so I can *really* get to cooking, why mess with a good thing?”

“Because variety is the spice of life, man!” Lance said, waving his arms around. “We need more varied sustenance in the meantime. We need something that tastes like *chicken*.”

“Really, you want variety, and your go-to flavour is *chicken*?” Keith said drily.

Pidge sat down with a loud *thump*, grinning widely as she opened her computer and slid it over to Hunk.

“It’s *done*.”

Hunk immediately scooped it up, giving a loud and happy whoop. “Heck yeah, Pidge! This calls for a celebration! More orange goop! We should have plenty leftover from my Just Invented Badass Jetpacks Extravaganza —”

“What’s done?” Lance asked, leaning over Hunk’s shoulder to read.

Allura clapped her hands, clasping them tightly. “Oh Pidge, this is wonderful!”

“Yes, congratulations on your first official dissertation, Pidge!” Shiro toasted her, smiling proudly.

“Oh, that’s really cool. Good job,” Keith said sincerely, patting her on the back from his seat next to hers.

“Wait ... *Pidge*, why is this ... *Did you write about me and Keith?!*” Lance snatched the computer away from Hunk, scanning the document quickly. “*The Effects of Repression and Denial as Applied to Romantic Archetypes in High Tension War-time Scenarios of Intergalactic Scale — Specific to Voltron Paladins of Primary Colours.*”

“I’m a primary colour,” Hunk said. “I hope you further specified that Yellow is an exception.”

“Absolutely, don’t worry.” Pidge grinned at Lance. “And yes, it is about you and Keith. I told you I wasn’t spying — I was compiling data.”

Coran gave Pidge his own toast with his wine glass. “And there was so much data to compile! I honestly haven’t seen such blatant refusal to confront emotions since my days in the Engineering Academy. Brutal. Uncompromising. No tears allowed and we built magnificent machines on the backs of our suppressed anxiety and cracking mental stability.” Coran sighed with fond nostalgia.

Keith exhaled slowly. “Right. Science for the sake of happiness. Just tell me you aren’t sending this in for review anywhere.”

“Well,” Pidge began as Lance started skimming through her paper, making noises of irritation and disgust as he did so, “there is one person who is uniquely qualified to read it, as she has a ten-year degree from a prestigious university, specializing in psychology and sentient-creature behaviours ...”

“Pidge. *No.*” Keith was horrified. Pidge loved it. “If you send it to Ter-Rinel, *she’ll spread it across all of Gyroq.* And then, if it makes it to *Deltris* —”

“It’s a scientific dissertation, with all the formality and jargon that implies!” Pidge insisted, not bothering to disguise her smirk at Keith and Lance’s growing dismay. “Quite frankly, Ter-Rinel needs some solid real-life examples of *repression*” — she pointed at Keith — “and denial” — and then at Lance — “to aid her in her work.”

“Hey, after being such annoying jerks for *months* while you worked your feelings out all over the Castle and Voltron,” Hunk said, eating happily, “I’m glad you’re being held up as examples of what *not* to do.”

“No one is going to read this for fun, guys,” Shiro said. “No offense, Pidge, but it’s really technical, it doesn’t even use your names —”

“Because there are *so many Blue and Red Paladins of Voltron* —” Lance began.

“And Ter-Rinel is trustworthy. If I tell her to keep it to herself, she will,” Pidge said. “I’ll be requesting that she keep it solely for her own records, so calm down, Lance.”

Keith let loose a long breath. “Okay. That’s fine. I meant what I said — good job on this. I mean, it’s pretty impressive work to write a dissertation ...”

“Keith, she called us dense and repressed,” Lance said flatly.

“Yeah? I’ll take repressed over dense,” Keith shot back, one eyebrow raised. “How long did it take for you to even *realize* you liked me?”

“Only a tiny bit longer than it took for you to *confess*,” Lance retorted with great annoyance. “As soon as my brain clicked onto *Keith is cool and I want to kiss his face*, I told you *within twenty seconds*, instead of brooding about it *forever*.”

Keith rolled his eyes. “Come talk to me when you’ve had to deal with *your stupid face* for *months* while crushing on it, and wanting to kiss it, but not being able to because it was *too thick to know it wanted the same thing*.”

“Such a romance for the ages,” Allura said wryly. “I can see why half the universe is so enamoured with you two.”

“Grand Moon Melquisor has sent yet another invitation for Lance and Keith, by the way.” Coran frowned a little as he showed it to Allura on his pocket computer. “This one seems safe ...”

“If it mentions *any* festivals, anniversaries, rituals or a gathering of more than fifty people, it is *not* safe,” Allura said immediately, her cheeks and ears taking on a pink glow. “Well, it would be *safe*, as you wouldn’t be in any danger, but, ah, unless you’ve suddenly become exhibitionist —”

“Nope, never, not happening,” Lance said.

“Ditto,” Keith added. “Also, could we get Captain Beatru to ease up on the holo business a little? The last planet we made first contact with *already knew* about Lance and me. It was creepy.”

“Forgive me, but it’s been such a fabulous tool for recruitment ...” Allura smiled brilliantly. “And diplomacy has hardly ever been easier for me! So many people willing to join the Arco Iris Alliance just to meet the Red and Blue Battle Lovers —”

“Ah, that *name*!” Lance gagged.

“— and it’s clear that while they start off as fans, they are aware of the threat the Galra pose, especially after that small incursion near Jeeroonian space, and are willing to lend aid and troops in whatever ways they are able.”

“Listen, if you two are uncomfortable with this, of course we’ll do everything we can to keep you out of the limelight,” Shiro said, watching Lance and Keith closely. “If you’re feeling threatened, or just a little awkward about it all, we can —”

“It’s not that bad, at least ... not yet,” Keith was quick to add. “Just ... maybe less with the parades and the requests for public make-outs?”

“Yeah, uh, I love to mack on my boyfriend, but screaming crowds, or that one time with the guys who liked to throw wet bread? Yeah, really not all that romantic. Or enjoyable. Like, at all,” Lance said slowly, smiling at Keith. “Not to diminish your kissing abilities, Red — you still make me swoon.”

Keith ducked his head, his own smile smaller but no less sincere. “Yeah, it’s, you know. Same.”

Pidge indulged their sweetness by not making gagging motions or flinging goop at Lance’s face this time.

Instead, she smiled at Shiro as she asked, “Do you think we could stop by Gyroq so I could give this to Ter-Rinel in person? The less we transmit, the better, and I would feel more comfortable giving her a physical copy — less likely to end up spread across the galaxy that way.”

“Maybe in a week or two,” Shiro said, watching everyone finish their dinner with a touch of apprehension. Pidge had eaten in her room while she was finishing up her final thoughts and notes, so she had nothing to distract her from Shiro’s sudden shiftiness.

“Um, if everyone’s all done, I need to have a talk with Lance and Keith.” Their leader appeared quite serious, and Pidge was instantly worried.

Hunk nodded. “If it’s about not using the holograms to scare me into thinking Sasquatch is real and an alien out for my blood, I’m cool with hearing this lecture.”

“*Hunk! You snitch!*” Lance pouted.

“Ah, no, but thanks for letting me know about that, Hunk,” Shiro said haltingly. “It’s more ... personal, and ...” He looked towards Allura, a tad desperate.

Allura's eyes widened, the pink flush returning. "Oh! Right! Of course, let's leave Shiro to have this talk —"

"Are you sure we can't help? Is this about using the gravity well on Trel to slingshot their lions into the nearby sun?" Coran rubbed his hands together. "Near incineration merits a talking-to, and I feel like, as an honorary uncle of sorts, no, an older brother of refined —"

"We didn't nearly *incinerate*," Keith protested. "We had it totally under control *and* we outmaneuvered the Galra ships, which was the whole *point* of —"

Shiro reached beneath the table and slammed something onto the surface. "Okay, if you don't want to witness me giving a supremely awkward talk about safe sex and consent, then *kindly leave the room*."

Pidge zeroed in on the box of *actual space condoms*, decided she wanted to stay sane for the foreseeable future and *bolted*.

"*Oh my god, please no!*" Lance wailed.

There was nothing but shocked horror emanating from Keith, and Pidge didn't care to turn and see his expression. Hunk was hot on her heels, as were Coran and Allura, though they were slightly more dignified in their exit. Slightly.

"I ... am going to ride my jetpack around and pretend the last two minutes didn't happen," Hunk said, his eyes huge in his face. "Wanna join?"

"No, thank you," Pidge said stoically. "I'll look over my dissertation a few more times. Maybe go back to working on that memory solvent."

"Ah, lemme know how *that* goes. See you later." Hunk disappeared down a hallway.

Allura laughed a little, smiling sheepishly at Pidge. “It’s good to know that humans also find these things a little ... gauche to speak off in public.”

“Not necessarily, but it’s really weird when it’s people you consider family,” Pidge said, shuddering. “I’m really glad I don’t have any of these urges. Yet. Or maybe I’ll never get them? Who knows?”

Coran ruffled Pidge’s hair. “Whatever happens, you know Shiro will be here to give you supremely awkward talks about it. And we’ll love you regardless.”

Pidge grinned up at both of them, a warm feeling in her belly. “I know. Thanks.”

Allura drifted off, citing a need to review some defensive strategies sent to her by several new members of the Alliance. Coran offered to help her, and soon, Pidge was left alone. She walked aimlessly throughout the Castle, exploring various nooks and crannies, even though there was little she hadn’t discovered.

It was probably due to months of observing Lance and Keith somewhat obsessively, to the point that it became second nature, but she somehow managed to stumble across the two Paladins in one of the observation decks, after their no doubt *highly* uncomfortable chat with Shiro. She hadn’t even realized how long she had been wandering about, wool-gathering, until she saw them, splayed out together on one of the couches, talking quietly.

She felt suddenly strange about seeing them in an intimate position after something so ... *disconcerting*, so she ducked behind a corner, reflexively, watching Lance bury his face in Keith’s chest.

“I sort of still wanna die,” he said with a groan. “How about you?”

“I was just starting to feel better, actually — thanks for ruining it,” Keith said, but he was smiling at the top of Lance’s head, quickly masking it when Lance looked up at him.

“I get that he had to do it. Shiro is awesome like that. But. I just. Gah.” Lance dropped his head back down. “I don’t think I ever want to have sex now.”

“Really?” Keith said, looking fairly amused. “Never ever?”

“... Okay, so that was a lie,” Lance said, a self-deprecating laugh escaping him. “You’re too hot for me to not want to bang you.”

“The romance, you have it in spades.” Lance poked at Keith’s neck without looking, and Keith flinched, chuckling a bit as he jabbed lightly at Lance’s side in retaliation. “But I know what you mean. The things Shiro said were *freaking terrifying* because *he* was the one saying them. And describing them. And then that thing with the diagrams —”

“Stop, Keith, *flashbacks, trauma*, geez —”

“But.” Keith paused for a long moment. “If it’s just us, and maybe if you were talking to me about those things ...”

Lance also took a minute to himself before saying, “Yeah. Um. Let’s save that for a day when I’m not reliving the fresh hell of Shiro making us practice condom application on Celthrian vegetables.”

Keith shuddered. “Okay, I get what you mean about flashbacks, I’m sorry, please cease and desist.”

Lance raised himself up on his arms, gazing at Keith with such a soft expression that Pidge felt her breath catch, her heart beating a tiny bit faster.

“There’s no one else I’d rather have beside me during a highly traumatizing safe sex lecture from my Voltron leader slash older brother figure slash pilot idol.” He leaned in further, breathing out his next words. “I want you around for any and all other potential horrors. And

also for all the good stuff. And for all the sad times. Just ... stick with me for all the things, please. I promise to stick by you.”

Keith’s face was doing something Pidge had never seen before. It was so ... open, and tender, and just ... content.

“You’ve got me for as long as you want me around.” Keith’s hands snuck around Lance’s waist, his fingers interlocking at the small of his back. “I’m crap at talking about this stuff, but ... I’m pretty sure I’ll want you around for a long time. Longer than we might actually have.”

“Shh, let’s not make this one of the sad times,” Lance said, his eyes falling shut as he dipped his head down for a kiss that Keith met him halfway on.

Pidge was turning away just as Keith was pulling Lance down, the taller boy covering him like a blanket as they kept kissing softly.

She felt a bit guilty for having lingered there as long as she did, but another part of her, a small piece of her that was new and shiny, was so happy to have witnessed something so honest and loving. Happier still knowing that it was between two people she adored like family, and that she had played a part, however small, in knocking them into each other’s orbit, compelling them to adjust and accept their new orientation.

But maybe it had been inevitable, and Pidge had just sped things along; Lance and Keith had clashed almost immediately, and things had started shifting for them, however turbulently, ever since.

Pidge ducked into another observation deck, taking up a spot on one of the couches, gazing out at the stars, her thoughts a warm and fuzzy jumble.

“Hey Pidge,” Hunk said, making her jump.

“Yeah?” She turned around with a smile, knowing that she probably looked a little dazed.

“I think our next big experiment should involve teleportation. Because I’m really mad that transporters aren’t a thing, and they should *absolutely* be a thing so that I don’t have to get motion sickness when traveling. Or jet packing.”

“But you’re cool with having your molecules broken down and then reconstructed entirely?” Pidge asked dubiously.

“Um, if it’s *thoroughly tested* and designed by you?” Hunk grinned. “Yeah.”

Pidge nodded. “You know what? I eat the impossible for breakfast, so let’s get on that, right now. I know for a fact we have some Celthrian vegetables that *no one* is going to be using for cooking, so we can commandeer those as our first test subjects ...”

Fin

Chapter End Notes

I finished, and I actually did it before the 20th. I have no words to express my thanks for all you lovely, incredible people that cheered me on. I hope this sappy ending didn’t disappoint.

Edit Feb. 1, 2017: I am writing a few scenes from either Lance or Keith’s perspective and posting them as one-shots in this series, which I’ve decided to call *Adjust Orbit and Velocity*. I’m taking no prompts for this because I already have quite a few — thanks!

Updating the series may be infrequent, as I have some Real Life stuff I have to do (school, work, the usual), and also a slight case of obsession with [Lance-and-Keith-as-](#)

[mercenary-space-cowboys](#) that I'm also writing out and posting slowly :)

Come find me on [Tumblr](#) if you wanna chat. And again, thank you so, so much being so very awesome — it's been such blast, thanks in large part to you guys! :D

And a quick couple of add-ons to once again express my gratitude for the kind human being that [created this photoset for this story!](#) And for the wondrous **Illusion** who's [work-in-progress](#) is awesome and has me so excited and giddy!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!